

Dow Jones Newswires

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Canada Ag Minister Renews WTO Threat On US Meat Label Law

By Bill Tomson
Of DOW JONES NEWSWIRE
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WASHINGTON (Dow Jones)--Canadian Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz on Friday renewed his threat of issuing a World Trade Organization challenge against the U.S. for implementing a country-of-origin labeling law for meat.

New "voluntary" measures for labeling that the Obama administration added to the mandatory requirements devised by the Bush administration are primarily what Canada is concerned about, Ritz said in a teleconference with reporters. Ritz met earlier Friday with U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary **Tom Vilsack** here in Washington.

The Bush administration finished writing the federal rule implementing Congress' labeling law in January, just days before the transition to the Obama administration. But in February, Vilsack said he didn't believe the Bush rule went far enough to inform consumers where their meat came from, so he asked that additional measures be added.

Vilsack is asking the U.S. meat-producing sector to add more information on the labels for what they produce and keep tighter track of inventoried products and where they came from.

But Ritz said he was disappointed in the changes.

"We thought we had a deal with the former administration that the final rule would be implemented in a way that was more friendly to [the U.S. import of] Canadian live cattle," Ritz said Friday.

Ritz said the Vilsack additions have Canadians concerned to the point that they will not hesitate to sue the U.S. via the WTO.

Canadian livestock producers "know that we will stand up for them," Ritz said. "We do have the WTO challenge idling at the curb and ready to go."

The Canadian minister suggested that there seemed to be no way around a WTO challenge.

"We discussed the nature of what it takes to constitute a [WTO] challenge," Ritz said of his discussion with Vilsack. "And Canada will move forward ... and at the time of our choosing."

-By Bill Tomson, Dow Jones Newswires; 202-646-0088; bill.tomson@dowjones.com [03-13-09 1525ET]

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A Section

Obama Targets Food Safety; President Announces New Leaders, Group to Upgrade Laws

Dan Eggen
Washington Post Staff Writer
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President Obama accused the Bush administration yesterday of creating a "hazard to public health" by failing to curb food contamination problems, and he announced new leadership and other changes aimed at modernizing **food-safety** laws.

In his weekly address to the nation, Obama said he is forming a **Food Safety** Working Group to "upgrade our **food safety** laws for the 21st century," and he formally named former New York City health chief Margaret A. Hamburg as his new Food and Drug Administration commissioner. Baltimore Health Commissioner Joshua Sharfstein will be Hamburg's deputy, he said.

Obama also said he will ask Congress for \$1 billion in new funds to add inspectors and modernize laboratories, and announced that the Agriculture Department is moving ahead with a rule change banning all sick or disabled cattle from entering the **food supply**. The change had stalled during the last months of the Bush administration, which allowed some "downer cows" to be slaughtered for sale.

"There are certain things only a government can do," Obama said. "And one of those things is ensuring that the foods we eat, and the medicines we take, are safe and do not cause us harm."

The announcements signaled another shift from the policies of President George W. Bush, whom Democrats accused of ignoring a worsening **food-safety** problem and politicizing the work of the FDA. The changes also follow outbreaks of illness from pathogens in food, including peanut products contaminated with **salmonella** that have killed nine and sickened more than 700 in recent months.

Consumer groups, **food-safety** advocates, patients' organizations and others from across the political spectrum praised the choice of Hamburg and Sharfstein for the FDA, which has struggled to retain public confidence amid outbreaks of food-borne illnesses, poisoning scares and drug controversies. The FDA is charged with overseeing the safety of most foods, medical devices, and prescription and over-the-counter drugs, which together amount to about 25 percent of all consumer spending.

Hamburg, 53, is a physician and bioterrorism expert who served as an assistant health secretary during the Clinton administration. She is widely credited with helping to turn around a demoralized New York City health department and cutting rates of drug-resistant tuberculosis. Hamburg's appointment requires Senate confirmation.

Sharfstein, 39, is a pediatrician who has served as Baltimore's health commissioner and who worked as a health policy aide to Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Calif.), now chairman of the commerce committee. Sharfstein attracted national attention when he took on the drug industry and petitioned the FDA in 2007 to restrict the use of over-the-counter cough and cold medications for young children.

Waxman said in a statement yesterday that Hamburg and Sharfstein have "strong public health credentials and demonstrated management abilities. These appointments give me great hope for the future of the FDA."

The American Public Health Association said Hamburg's nomination "signals a commitment to protecting consumer health," while the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America said it "applauds President Obama for his expeditious selection."

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The move to ban the butchering of disabled cattle also garnered accolades from groups including the Humane Society of the United States, which released videotapes in 2007 showing the abuse of sick and crippled dairy cows at a California slaughterhouse. The videos led to the largest meat recall in U.S. history, as well as protests overseas over the safety of U.S. meat.

Most disabled cattle were banned from the U.S. **food supply** in January 2004 after the discovery of the first U.S. case of **bovine spongiform** encephalopathy, which has been linked to downer cattle. But the Bush administration allowed exceptions and did not follow through on promises to plug the loophole last year after the uproar over the beef recall.

"The closing of the loophole improves the welfare of animals and strengthens the safety of our nation's **food supply**," the Humane Society said in a statement.

Obama noted in his address that many of the nation's **food-safety** laws "have not been updated since they were written in the time of Teddy Roosevelt," and said the FDA was "underfunded and understaffed" during Bush's tenure. Obama said that outbreaks of illness from contaminated food have risen from 100 a year in the 1990s to 350 a year now and that only 5 percent of the nation's 150,000 food processing plants are inspected each year. "That is a hazard to public health," he said. "It is unacceptable."

The president also invoked his status as a parent, saying that his 7-year-old daughter, Sasha, "has peanut butter sandwiches for lunch probably three times a week."

"No parent should have to worry that their child is going to get sick from their lunch, just as no family should have to worry that the medicines they are buying will cause them harm," he said. "Protecting the safety of our food and drugs is one of the most fundamental responsibilities government has."

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102

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The New York Times

National Desk; SECTA
President Plans Team To Overhaul Food Safety

By GARDINER HARRIS

649 words

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The New York Times

Late Edition - Final

24

English

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WASHINGTON -- Describing the government's failure to inspect 95 percent of food processing plants as "a hazard to the public health," President Obama promised Saturday to bolster and reorganize the nation's fractured food-safety system.

"In the end, food safety is something I take seriously, not just as your president, but as a parent," Mr. Obama said in his weekly radio and Internet address.

Mr. Obama announced the creation of a Food Safety Working Group, which will include the secretaries of health and agriculture, to advise him on which laws and regulations need to be changed, to foster coordination across federal agencies, and to ensure that laws are enforced.

Along with Mr. Obama's announcement, **Tom Vilsack**, the agriculture secretary, announced that "downer cattle," or those that cannot walk, will be banned from slaughter. In the past, cattle that passed a pre-slaughter inspection and then became injured could be sold into the food system if an inspector certified the meat as safe. This case-by-case exception system will be abandoned. Last year, only about 1,000 out of 34 million slaughtered cattle got into the food supply with such exceptions.

A bipartisan chorus of powerful lawmakers in Congress has promised to enact fundamental changes in the nation's food-protection system. On Saturday, Mr. Obama made clear that he not only supported that legislative effort but that he also might push to expand it.

A dozen federal agencies share responsibility for ensuring the safety of the nation's food supply, an oversight system that critics and government investigators have for years said needed major revisions.

A debate has erupted on Capitol Hill in recent months about whether to bolster food oversight at the Food and Drug Administration or assign those responsibilities to a separate agency that would eventually absorb the food-oversight duties of the other 11 agencies, including the Food Safety Inspection Service of the Department of Agriculture. Advocates on both sides of the issue have speculated for weeks about which approach the administration would support.

Those calling for a combined food agency were heartened last month when Mr. Vilsack said that a united agency made sense and that the huge recall of products made with tainted peanuts "is a grand opportunity for us to take a step back and rethink our approach."

In his address, Mr. Obama announced, as expected, that he would nominate Dr. Margaret A. Hamburg, a former New York City health commissioner, to be commissioner of the F.D.A. and would appoint Dr. Joshua Sharfstein, the health commissioner in Baltimore, to become the principal deputy commissioner at the F.D.A.

As health commissioner in New York City, "Dr. Hamburg brought new life to a demoralized agency," Mr. Obama said.

Thirty-five years ago, the F.D.A. did annual inspections of about half of the nation's food-processing facilities. Last year, the agency inspected just 7,000 of the nearly 150,000 domestic food facilities, and its oversight of foreign plants, which provide a growing share of the nation's food supply, was even spottier.

Experts have long debated whether the F.D.A. should increase inspections or rely instead on private auditors and more detailed safety rules. By calling the limited number of government inspections an

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"unacceptable" public health hazard, Mr. Obama came down squarely on the side of increased government inspections.

"Whenever a president uses such strong language, that's a big, meaningful occurrence," said William Hubbard, a former F.D.A. associate commissioner who has called for increased food inspections. "I think it's terrific that attention is being focused on this issue."

Each year, about 76 million people in the United States are sickened by contaminated food, hundreds of thousands are hospitalized and about 5,000 die, public health experts estimate.

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The Washington Times

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Sunday, March 15, 2009

Obama forms group to protect U.S. food supply

(102)

Stephen Dinan (Contact)

President Obama on Saturday created a food safety working group to advise him on new rules and tools to protect the U.S. food supply and tapped two people to serve at the top of the Food and Drug Administration.

Mr. Obama said food-borne illness outbreaks have increased in recent years - including major salmonella outbreaks involving spinach in 2006, peppers or tomatoes last year, and peanuts this year. He said these and other cases show that the United States must do more than it has been doing, and he called on his food safety group, led by the secretaries of the departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services, to give him recommendations.

"This working group will bring together Cabinet secretaries and senior officials to advise me on how we can upgrade our food safety laws for the 21st century, foster coordination throughout government and ensure that we are not just designing laws that will keep the American people safe, but enforcing them," Mr. Obama said in his weekly radio address.

He announced that he will nominate Dr. Margaret Hamburg, former HHS assistant secretary and former health commissioner of New York City, to be FDA commissioner. He also tapped Dr. Joshua Sharfstein, Baltimore's health commissioner, to be FDA's principal deputy commissioner.

The president also said he'll boost the number of inspectors, saying the FDA has been so understaffed in recent years that it can inspect only 5 percent of the nation's 150,000 food processing plants each year.

Mr. Obama said food safety hits him personally.

"When I heard peanut products were being contaminated earlier this year, I immediately thought of my 7-year-old daughter, Sasha, who has peanut butter sandwiches for lunch probably three times a week," he said.

While avowing that he still doesn't "believe government has the answer to every problem," the president said food safety is one area where citizens rely on the government to ensure food and medicines are not harmful.

In the Republican radio address, Sen. Charles E. Grassley of Iowa, the top Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, continued Republicans' attacks on Mr. Obama's economic program, saying he's taxing too much and spending too much.

He said the president's anti-greenhouse gas proposal "could amount to an average

hidden tax increase of around \$3,000 per household a year" and cited a study calculating that Mr. Obama's plan to cut down on tax deductions for charitable giving could reduce philanthropy by \$9 billion.

"Americans need leadership, and they need confidence now. They need their president and their elected representatives to connect all the dots. Jobs are hard-won. The government should first do no harm," he said.

(102)

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Obama announces new food safety measures

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE

Associated Press Writer

934 words

14 March 2009

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Associated Press Newswires

English

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WASHINGTON (AP) - The **food safety** system in the U.S. is a "hazard to public health" and overdue for an overhaul, President Barack Obama said Saturday as he filled the top job at the Food and Drug Administration.

Obama used his weekly radio and video address to announce the nomination of former New York City Health Commissioner Margaret Hamburg as agency commissioner and the selection of Baltimore's health commissioner, Joshua Sharfstein as her deputy. Consumer groups applauded the picks.

The president also is creating a special advisory group to coordinate **food safety** laws and recommend how to update them. Many of these laws have not changed since they were written early in the last century, he said.

Obama said too many agencies are responsible for **food safety**, making it difficult to share information and stop problems from falling through the cracks.

The FDA does not have enough money or workers to conduct annual inspections at more than a fraction of the 150,000 food processing plants and warehouses in the country, Obama said.

"That is a hazard to public health. It is unacceptable. And it will change under the leadership of Dr. Margaret Hamburg," he pledged.

Hamburg, 53, is a bioterrorism expert. She was an assistant health secretary under President Bill Clinton and helped lay the groundwork for the government's bioterrorism and flu pandemic preparations.

As New York City's top health official in the early 1990s, she created a program that cut high rates of drug-resistant tuberculosis. She is the daughter of two doctors. Her mother was the first black woman to earn a medical degree from Yale University, and she credits her father for instilling in her a passion for public health.

Sharfstein, 39, is a pediatrician who has challenged the FDA on the safety of over-the-counter cold medicines for children. He also served as a health policy aide to Democratic Rep. Henry Waxman of California, who plays a leading role in overseeing the pharmaceutical industry.

Both are doctors and outsiders to the troubled agency and will face the daunting challenge of trying to turn it around.

Those with a stake in the FDA's work, from health and consumer groups to the food and drug industries, said Obama made the right choices.

The Trust for America's Health said Hamburg is a proven manager who turned around the ailing health department in New York City.

"She restored both morale among workers and the agency's credibility among citizens," said Lowell Weicker Jr., a former Connecticut senator and president of the trust's board. "And she has shown she can reach across party lines, having worked for both Democratic and Republican mayors in New York City."

Gail Cassell, a vice president of the pharmaceutical firm Eli Lilly & Co. who once served on a government advisory board with Hamburg, said Hamburg "is a big believer" in backing up policy with the best scientific evidence and data.

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"She is very balanced and thoughtful about the actions that she takes and certainly has had the experience of running a very complex organization," Cassell said.

Ellen Bloom of Consumers Union said Sharfstein's experience is "just what the doctor ordered for FDA."

The main food industry group said Obama seems committed to overhauling the agency.

"The president's appointment of these two prominent public health professionals is a clear signal that this administration has placed a priority on bolstering FDA's **food safety** role," said Pamela Bailey, president and chief executive of the Grocery Manufacturers Association.

Hamburg's appointment requires Senate confirmation; Sharfstein's does not.

Obama said while he does not believe government has the answer to every problem, there are certain things that only government can do such as "ensuring that the foods we eat and the medicines we take are safe and don't cause us harm."

"Protecting the safety of our food and drugs is one of the most fundamental responsibilities government has," he said.

Obama cited a string of breakdowns in assuring **food safety** in recent years, from contaminated spinach in 2006 to **salmonella** in peppers and possibly tomatoes last year. This year, a massive **salmonella** outbreak in peanut products has sickened more than 600 people, is suspected of causing nine deaths and led to one of the largest product recalls in U.S. history.

These cases are a "painful reminder of how tragic the consequences can be when food producers act irresponsibly and government is unable to do its job," Obama said, noting that contaminated food outbreaks have more than tripled to nearly 350 a year from 100 incidents annually in the early 1990s.

Separately, Obama announced a ban on the slaughter of "downer" cows, which are too sick or weak to stand on their own, to keep them out of the **food supply**. These animals pose a higher risk of having **mad cow** disease, **E. coli** and other infections.

Obama said he takes **food safety** seriously, not just as a president but also as the parent of two young daughters.

"No parent should have to worry that their child is going to get sick from their lunch," he said.

Also awaiting the next FDA chief is a renewed effort in Congress to require government regulation of cigarettes and other tobacco products, to reduce the harm from smoking.

Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar, Mary Clare Jalonick and Lauran Neergaard contributed to this report.

On the Net:

Obama address: <http://www.whitehouse.gov>

Food and Drug Administration: <http://www.fda.gov>

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Document APRS000020090314e53e002ov



102

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UPDATE 3-Obama picks FDA chief, starts food safety panel

755 words
14 March 2009
06:00
Reuters News
English
(c) 2009 Reuters Limited

- * Margaret Hamburg to head FDA
- * Joshua Sharfstein named deputy
- * HHS and USDA to work out new food safety structure (Adds lawmaker comment, details on Hamburg)

By Lisa Richwine

WASHINGTON, March 14 (Reuters) - President Barack Obama on Saturday chose public health and biological threat expert Dr. Margaret Hamburg to run the troubled U.S. Food and Drug Administration and announced a Cabinet-level food safety group.

Obama also outlined measures to keep diseased cows from entering the food supply and promised to increase the number of FDA food inspectors and modernize food safety labs.

He selected Baltimore Health Commissioner Dr. Joshua Sharfstein to serve as Hamburg's principal deputy.

Hamburg is a former New York City health chief and she worked on policy issues in President Clinton's health department. She has experience on topics ranging from AIDS to reduction of biological threats.

"Dr. Hamburg brings to this vital position not only a reputation of integrity but a record of achievement in making Americans safer and more secure," Obama said in his weekly radio address.

If confirmed by the Senate, Hamburg will take over an agency battered by a string of often deadly food poisoning and drug safety issues, including an ongoing outbreak of salmonella in peanut products that forced the largest food recall in U.S. history.

The choice signals the FDA's priority under the Obama administration will be safety and not necessarily speeding through drug approvals.

The salmonella outbreak has made 683 people in 46 states sick, killed as many as nine and forced the recall of more than 3,000 products.

"When I heard peanut products were being contaminated earlier this year, I immediately thought of my 7-year-old daughter, Sasha, who has peanut butter sandwiches for lunch probably three times a week," Obama said.

"No parent should have to worry that their child is going to get sick from their lunch."

UNDERFUNDED, UNDERSTAFFED

Obama said outdated food safety laws were in part to blame. "Inspection and enforcement is spread out so widely among so many people that it's difficult for different parts of our government to share information, work together, and solve problems," he said.

The FDA "has been underfunded and understaffed in recent years, leaving the agency with the resources to inspect just 7,000 of our 150,000 food-processing plants and warehouses each year. That means roughly 95 percent of them go uninspected," he added.

Obama said he would assign his Health and Human Services secretary -- his nominee is former Kansas

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governor Kathleen Sebelius -- and Agriculture Secretary **Tom Vilsack** to head a group to advise on ways to improve food safety laws.

Hamburg led an Institute of Medicine panel that reported on microbial threats in 2003. As New York City health commissioner, she battled an outbreak of drug-resistant tuberculosis fueled by the AIDS epidemic.

"There are few jobs in the federal government that are as tough or important as FDA commissioner," said Jean Halloran, director of food policy initiatives at Consumers Union.

Hamburg's nomination means the FDA will "have the leadership it needs at a time when it faces huge challenges," Halloran added.

LOW MORALE

Democratic Congressman Bart Stupak said he was pleased Obama went outside the agency for a new chief. He said the FDA had been "plagued by low morale, antiquated systems, inadequate funding and management more interested in protecting the companies they regulate than the American people."

Reports by outside experts have found the FDA underfunded and ill-equipped to manage its oversight of prescription drugs, medical devices, most foods and other products that account for about one-quarter of the U.S. economy.

Obama highlighted a new USDA rule to keep sick and injured cattle out of slaughterhouses to safeguard against mad cow disease.

He praised Sharfstein for "efforts to protect children from unsafe over-the-counter cough and cold medications" and a program to ensure people with disabilities have access to prescription drugs.

The pharmaceutical industry's main lobbying group praised Hamburg's selection but did not comment on Sharfstein, who did previous work for Democratic Congressman Henry Waxman, a harsh critic of drugmakers.

Hamburg "brings managerial skills that are essential for directing science-based activities," said Billy Tauzin, head of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America. (Reporting by Lisa Richwine, Maggie Fox and Jeff Mason; Editing by Xavier Briand)

OBAMA-FDA/ (UPDATE 3)|LANGEN|AFA|CSA|LBY|RSA|RWS|REULB|GNS|ABX|BNX|SXNA

Document LBA0000020090314e53e00060

Government acts to permanently ban slaughter of cows too sick or weak to stand on their own

567 words

14 March 2009

13:32

Associated Press Newswires

English

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WASHINGTON (AP) - The government on Saturday permanently banned the slaughter of cows too sick or weak to stand on their own, seeking to further minimize the chance that mad cow disease could enter the food supply.

The Agriculture Department proposed the ban last year after the biggest beef recall in U.S. history. The recall involved a Chino, Calif., slaughterhouse and "downer" cows. The Obama administration finalized the ban on Saturday.

"As part of our commitment to public health, our Agriculture Department is closing a loophole in the system to ensure that diseased cows don't find their way into the food supply," President Barack Obama said in his weekly radio and video address.

Those kind of cows pose a higher risk of having mad cow disease. They also susceptible to infections from bacteria that cause food poisoning, such as E. coli, because the animals wallow in feces.

The recall also raised concerns about the treatment of cattle and came after an investigator for the Humane Society of the United States videotaped workers abusing downer cows to force them to slaughter.

Agriculture Secretary **Tom Vilsack** said the ban was "a step forward for both food safety and the standards for humane treatment of animals."

The Humane Society's president and chief executive, Wayne Pacelle, said he was pleased that the government "is putting a stop to the inhumane and reckless practice of dragging and otherwise abusing downer cows in order to slaughter them for human consumption."

A partial ban on downer cows was in place; it resulted from the nation's first case of mad cow disease, in 2003.

But there was a loophole. If a cow collapsed after passing inspection, government inspectors allowed the animal into the food supply if it had an acute injury, such as a broken leg, but showed no signs of central nervous disorder that might indicate the presence of mad cow disease.

Obama called the country's food inspection system "a hazard to public health," citing outbreaks of deadly food poisoning in peanuts this year, peppers and possibly tomatoes last year and spinach in 2006.

He named his candidates for the top jobs at the Food and Drug Administration, which together with the Agriculture Department is responsible for much of the government's food inspection.

Mad cow disease is the common name for bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or BSE. In people, eating meat contaminated with BSE is linked to variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, a rare and deadly nerve disease. A massive outbreak of mad cow disease in the United Kingdom that peaked in 1993 was blamed for the deaths of 180,000 cattle and more than 150 people.

There have been three confirmed cases of BSE in the United states, in a Canadian-born cow in 2003 in Washington state, in 2005 in Texas and in 2006 in Alabama. The Bush administration in 2006 dramatically scaled back testing for mad cow disease.

No illnesses have been linked to those cows in the United States. There have been three cases of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease confirmed in people living in the United States, but those were linked to meat products in the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



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U.S. finalizes ban on cattle too sick to walk

By Christopher Doering

347 words

14 March 2009

06:00

Reuters News

English

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WASHINGTON, March 14 (Reuters) - Cattle too sick or injured to walk will no longer be allowed to enter U.S. slaughterhouses, the Agriculture Department said in a rule finalized on Saturday, nearly a year after the largest meat recall in American history spurred the change.

The **USDA** proposed a total ban on all "downer" cattle from being slaughtered in May 2008, three months after a video showed workers at the Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing plant in California forcing sick and injured cattle into a slaughterhouse.

A few weeks after the video was released, Hallmark recalled 143 million pounds of meat, the largest U.S. meat recall ever.

"This rule is designed to enhance consumer confidence and humane handling standards and will provide clear guidance that non-ambulatory cattle will not be allowed to enter the human **food supply**," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in a statement.

"It is a step forward for both **food safety** and the standards for humane treatment of animals."

In the past, most downer cattle were banned, but **USDA** allowed the slaughter of some animals that became too injured to move after they were inspected. Packers were required to alert **USDA** veterinarians in those cases so the cattle could be reinspected before they were slaughtered for food.

About 2,700 of the 34 million cattle slaughtered in 2007 were reinspected under this exception. Just under 1,000 were approved and allowed to enter the **food supply**, according to **USDA**.

The new rule would block these animals from entering the **food supply**. Instead, they would be marked "U.S. condemned" and the packer must notify **USDA's Food Safety** Inspection Service if cattle become disabled after passing an earlier inspection.

The ban on downer cattle is one of the U.S. safeguards against **mad cow** disease. (Reporting by Christopher Doering; editing by Todd Eastham)

MADCOW-BAN/USDA|LANGEN|ABN|C|GRO|SOF|E|U|RBN|G|AFA|CSA|LBY|RWSA|RWS|REULB|GNS|M
TL|RNP|DNP|PGE|PCO

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104

ANALYSIS-Obama's US FDA picks bring public health focus

10/2

544 words
14 March 2009
15:55
Reuters News
English
(c) 2009 Reuters Limited

*Hamburg at FDA means emphasis on safety

*Drugmakers silent about No. 2 Sharfstein

*Democrats, consumer groups approve of Hamburg

By Lisa Richwine

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Barack Obama's choices to lead the Food and Drug Administration place an emphasis on public health and safety at an agency that has struggled with contaminated food and serious drug side effects.

Dr. Margaret Hamburg, named by Obama Saturday to serve as FDA commissioner, served as New York City's health commissioner, where she was known for a program that sharply cut tuberculosis infection rates, and has experience on issues ranging from AIDS to reduction of biological threats.

Obama appointed Dr. Joshua Sharfstein, the current health commissioner in Baltimore, as Hamburg's principal deputy. Sharfstein made headlines for pushing the FDA in recent years to warn against use of over-the-counter cough and cold medicines in young children.

The two doctors won praise from public health experts, consumer groups and Democratic lawmakers who have criticized the FDA's handling of risky medicines and tainted food, including an ongoing outbreak of **salmonella** in peanut products that has killed up to nine people.

"Dr. Hamburg and Dr. Sharfstein will bring dynamic new leadership to an agency that sorely needs it and will return sound scientific judgment to the FDA," Senator Edward Kennedy, chairman of the chamber's Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, said in a statement.

Hamburg's appointment must be confirmed by the Senate.

Former Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala called Hamburg "unflappable" and said she would shield the FDA from political interference while working to protect the public from dangerous products. Hamburg worked on health policy issues under Shalala in former president Bill Clinton's HHS.

"I think she starts out being concerned about safety -- the safety of pharmaceuticals, the safety of food. There's just no question in my mind, and that's exactly what we expect of the FDA commissioner," Shalala said in a telephone interview.

DELAYED APPROVALS

Drugmakers worry, however, that too much emphasis on safety keeps medicines from reaching patients.

The industry's main lobbying group welcomed Hamburg's nomination but had no comment on Sharfstein, who has done work for Democratic Rep. Henry Waxman, a strong critic of pharmaceutical companies.

Hamburg "brings managerial skills that are essential for directing science-based activities," said Billy Tauzin, head of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

The FDA was accused in the past of being too close to drugmakers, which pay the agency hundreds of millions of dollars each year to help fund reviews of their products.

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Criticism grew after Merck & Co's 2004 recall of arthritis drug Vioxx over a link to heart attacks and strokes.

Reports by outside experts found the FDA severely underfunded considering its enormous responsibilities overseeing prescription drugs, most foods, medical devices and other products that account for one-quarter of the U.S. economy.

Waxman, chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said Hamburg and Sharfstein had "strong public health credentials and demonstrated management abilities. These appointments give me great hope for the future of the FDA."

(Editing by Maggie Fox and Philip Barbara)

OBAMA-FDA (ANALYSIS)|LANGEN|RNA|FUN

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105

DOWJONES



Shoppers will have more information about where food comes from under new rule

151 words

16 March 2009

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Associated Press Newswires

English

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WASHINGTON (AP) - Shoppers will have more information about where their food comes from under a new policy starting Monday.

Labels on most fresh meats, along with some fruits, vegetables and other foods, will now list where the food originated. In the case of meats, some labels will list where the animal was born, raised and slaughtered.

Food safety groups have long lobbied for the policy, which was enacted by Congress as part of a wide-ranging farm bill last year. It's also popular with ranchers in the northern part of the United States who compete with Canadian cattle producers.

Agriculture Secretary **Tom Vilsack** last month asked the meat industry to go beyond the new policy, which was written by the Bush administration, to be even more specific about where an animal was born, raised and slaughtered.

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Document APRS000020090316e53g001f0

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DOW JONES

USA TODAY.com

MONEY

Synthetic hormone cut from dairy ; Consumers don't want rbST in their products

Bruce Horovitz

458 words

16 March 2009

USA Today

FIRST

B.4

English

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Got rbST?

That's not the latest space critter in a George Lucas film. It's a synthetic **growth hormone** (recombinant bovine somatotropin) used to spur cows to produce more milk. Many dairies and retailers — including General Mills, Dannon and Wal-Mart — are nixing it from dairy products in a world of rising food fears.

Even in a sick economy, low price isn't the only hot sales tool for foods. There's also marketing value in telling consumers about some ingredients not in foods. "Companies do bow to the will of consumers," says Gary Hirshberg, CEO of Stonyfield Farm, which has never used synthetic hormones.

In a nation of food worriers, the move by the \$110 billion dairy industry is overdue, **nutrition** guru Marion Nestle says. "Why screw around with milk, of all things?" asks the author of *What to Eat*.

The move away from rbST comes at a time consumer concern about food quality is on the rise. Since last year's **salmonella** outbreak, 45% of Americans say they are even more concerned about **food safety**, according to a survey of 1,000 consumers by researcher TNS Global.

While the Food and Drug Administration says there are no health risks to humans from rbST, there are studies that indicate the synthetic may harm dairy cows. (All cows produce natural **bST** hormone.) **Monsanto**, which had made rbST, sold the business to Eli Lilly last year.

"RbST has been used safely for 15 years and has contributed to the affordability of dairy products worldwide," Lilly spokeswoman Joan Todd says. She says its effects reduce the carbon footprint for the dairy cow by about 9%.

The use of synthetic growth hormones in dairy cows is prohibited in Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and many European countries.

Among those dropping rbST:

*General Mills. The maker of Yoplait yogurt announced plans last month to phase it out by August. "While the safety of milk from cows treated with rbST is not an issue, our consumers are expressing a preference for milk from cows not treated with rbST," marketing chief Becky O'Grady says.

*Dannon. The dairy giant says it will eliminate rbST before the end of the year. "We are listening to customers," spokesman Michael Neuwirth says. He says the company receives a few dozen e-mails a month from consumers on the topic.

*Wal-Mart. Last year, the retailer said its store brand, Great Value, has eliminated rbST.

*Fresh & Easy. The grocer's milk has never contained rbST, but it's now aired radio ads noting the fact, spokesman Roberto Munoz says. "We've done focus groups, and people don't want it."

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CQ TODAY PRINT EDITION – ENVIRONMENT
March 13, 2009 – 7:13 p.m.

Senate Seeks to Ease House Passage for Lands Bill

(107)

By Avery Palmer, CQ Staff

In an apparent attempt to ease hurdles in the House, the Senate will hold a procedural vote Monday on a long-delayed omnibus federal lands bill, with an eye toward passage later in the week.

The bill combines more than 150 measures that would designate new wilderness areas, expand national parks and historic sites, and establish additional protections for public lands. A similar bill already passed the Senate in January and has wide bipartisan support.

Last week, the House narrowly failed to pass the bill (S 22) under suspension of the rules, falling two votes short of the two-thirds majority required. House Democrats did not bring the bill up under regular order because they wanted to prevent Republicans from offering motions to recommit the bill, which could force politically sensitive votes for Democrats on issues such as gun rights.

The Senate now plans to move the legislation again by stripping the text of a House-passed battlefield preservation bill (HR 146) and replacing it with the lands bill. Because the bill number already passed the House, Republicans in that chamber will not be allowed to offer motions to recommit after the Senate sends it back, and the House could clear it by voting to accept the Senate's amendment.

Senators will vote Monday to invoke cloture on a motion to proceed to the bill, followed in the coming days with a cloture vote to end debate and then a vote on final passage.

Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., said he would block any attempt to pass it by voice vote, which would expedite the process.

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March 14, 2009

Labor Secretary Proposes Suspending Farm Rules

By STEVEN GREENHOUSE

Labor Secretary Hilda L. Solis announced Friday that she would suspend regulations that the Bush administration introduced in December to make it easier and cheaper for agricultural employers to use foreign workers in temporary jobs.

Just hours after being officially sworn on Friday morning, Ms. Solis said she would suspend the regulations for nine months. The move could create turmoil for growers who had already applied to bring in temporary farm workers under the new rules.

Last year, tens of thousands of foreign workers were brought in under the temporary agricultural program, known as H-2A, harvesting lettuce, sweet potatoes, tobacco, cucumbers, sugar cane and other crops. The new rules cut the wages that many of these workers will receive and reduced the amount that growers had to reimburse these workers for their travel. They also eased administrative burdens by letting employers simply attest that they had met various program requirements. Ms. Solis, who criticized the rules when she was in Congress, said suspending them was "the prudent and responsible action" to take "because many stakeholders have raised concerns about the H-2A regulations."

Many farm worker and labor groups had attacked the Bush regulations, saying they would push down wages for H-2A workers and take away jobs from workers in the United States. Growers generally applauded the rules, saying they would reduce red tape in employing foreign seasonal workers who they said did arduous farm jobs that few Americans wanted to do.

Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao announced the rules on Dec. 18, and they took effect on Jan. 17. Ms. Solis said the proposed suspension would be open for public comment for 10 days.

"It will throw a lot of people into limbo," said Sharon Hughes, a consultant to many growers who use H-2A workers. "A lot of people have placed orders for these workers, and this will cause some panic in the industry."

Erik Nicholson, a national vice president of the United Farm Workers, applauded Ms. Solis's decision, calling the Bush rules "some of the worst setbacks for farm workers in decades." He added, "They meant worse wages and worse housing conditions for these workers and worse discrimination against American workers."

Labor Department officials said one reason for the suspension was a fear that there would be major administrative delays in granting temporary work visas.

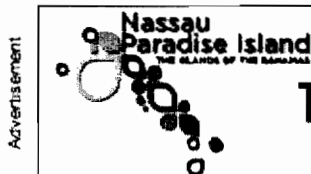
In December, Ms. Solis, then a California representative, condemned the regulations.

“With many families already burdened by this bad economy,” she said, “our nation cannot afford these guest worker program changes. There is no question that the guest-worker program needs significant overhaul, but slashing wages and reducing basic rights for the most vulnerable workers in our country, especially hardworking Latino farm workers, is not the answer.”

Jasper Hempel, executive vice president of the Western Growers Association, praised the Bush rules as reducing red tape. But he said the nation needed legislation, known as the AgJOBS bill, that would stabilize the farm labor situation by giving the more than one million illegal farm workers a path to legalization.

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Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack says farmers face several challenges

Agriculture Secretary **Tom Vilsack**, 58, talked to USA TODAY reporter **Sue Kirchhoff** about the farm economy, President Obama's budget and troubles plaguing the fledgling ethanol industry. Excerpts from the interview have been edited for content and clarity.

Q: Can you assess the farm economy? Prices for corn, wheat, dairy and other products have dropped in recent months, while production costs have remained high.

A: In 2008, we saw substantial increases in farm income, exports early in the year, continued strength of the renewable fuels industry. Let's take it to 2009: Almost all the commodities across the board have seen a decline in pricing, some more severe and more dramatic than others.

We're dealing with issues in dairy, pork, walnuts; there are invasive species issues in citrus that are impacting, potentially, yields, and there is drought in California and Texas. ... There is also concern in the renewable fuel industry, because ethanol production facilities, biofuel facilities are operating on relatively slim margins, if they have any margins at all.

The one saving grace, to the extent that there is a saving grace in these difficult economic times, is that the farm community, generally speaking, is far less leveraged than the general population or other businesses and industries. ... For every dollar in debt, farmers and ranchers have \$9 of equity or assets. That's (substantially better) than in the last farm crisis in the '80s, when we lost a lot of farms.

Q: What is the USDA strategy?

A: We're buying butter, we're buying non-fat dry milk ... 207 million pounds of (dairy), which is a lot.

(Another focus is) how do you help create markets for products? Our focus here has been on renewable energy, encouraging the (Environmental Protection Agency) to consider an adjustment to (rules on the amount of ethanol that can be blended with gasoline) so that more ethanol is required, therefore, more ethanol will be sold.

Q: What will you do with dairy purchases?

A: What we are going to do ... for the most part is to get them into the school lunch program and get them into the food banks.

Q: Are you hearing from farmers concerned about access to credit ?

A: The area where there has been a credit issue is the capacity of ethanol production facilities to maintain the necessary cash flow or ... the capacity of these new institutions to be funded. We are looking closely at the impact of this (recession) on minority and socially disadvantaged farmers who might be in areas where there could potentially be problems. We are keeping a close look on California because of the drought.

Q: President Obama's budget plan calls for a \$250,000 limit on commodity subsidies and ending direct payments, made regardless of crop prices or whether land is under production, for farmers with more than \$500,000 in annual gross sales. The budget also

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seeks more nutrition aid for children and low-income families. You've said the budget is a choice between well-off farmers and hungry children. Lawmakers call the budget dead on arrival. What now?

A: The president is very clear about his priorities. ... He is very interested in making sure that we do important work in promoting nutrition and promoting better healthy life choices, particularly for our children. He's also very clear that we have to be sensitive to the fiscal realities of ... deficits. ... This is a process in which Congress has the ability to recast those priorities, and we hope over the course of time, they become shared priorities, and I think many are shared priorities. When the president talks about direct payments, he is talking about a relatively small percentage of farmers. ... There are a lot of additional tools available. ... We're not proposing to take everything away.

Q: Is there a direct trade-off between farm programs and nutrition aid?

A: There are a multitude of ways in which that could have been phrased, and I probably phrased that inartfully, but budgets are about choices. The president has put his priorities on the table, and one of those priorities, but by no means the only priority, is greater nutrition for children.

Q: How do you answer criticisms that corn-based ethanol pushes up food prices and the industry isn't sustainable without subsidies?

A: If there were a direct correlation, then we would have seen a decline in food prices. The last evidence I saw is that food prices went up, still between 5% and 6% in the last quarter, with ethanol dropping dramatically. Prices are more directly linked to energy costs of a petroleum nature.

This is an industry that this administration is committed to. ... We can use our loan guarantee capacity to make lenders a bit more comfortable with giving (ethanol) facilities time to get out of this tough spot. ... Maybe (loans) can be restructured, so long as bankers are willing to work to reconfigure, whether from interest rate reductions or principal reductions, or some way ... it becomes a little easier for those facilities to remain in business.

Find this article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/food/2009-03-15-agriculture-vilsack-farmers_N.htm

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REUTERS

Obama names Miller, Tonsager to top USDA posts

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WASHINGTON, March 13 (Reuters) - President Barack Obama chose Jim Miller to run the U.S. farm subsidy program and **Dallas Tonsager** as the top rural development official at the Agriculture Department, the White House said on Friday.

Both appointments, as USDA undersecretary, require Senate confirmation. In late February, Obama selected Kathleen Merrigan for deputy secretary, the No. 2 job at USDA.

Miller, now chief of staff at the National Farmers Union, would have one of the largest portfolios at USDA. He would oversee U.S. farm subsidies, export programs and the Foreign Agriculture Service.

A farm policy veteran, Miller has served as a Senate Budget Committee analyst, an NFU economist, a wheat lobbyist and president of the National Association of Wheat Growers in 1987.

Tonsager, a board member at the Farm Credit Administration since 2004, was USDA's state director for rural development in South Dakota during the Clinton era. He ran a center on "value-added" agriculture products in South Dakota from 2002 to 2004.

Miller and Tonsager grew up on farms. (Reporting by Charles Abbott; Editing by Christian Wiessner)

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Obama says no quick end to ethanol dispute

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By Alan Beattie in Washington

Published: March 15 2009 02:37 | Last updated: March 15 2009 02:37

Barack Obama on Saturday said there would be no quick resolution to a dispute with Brazil over restricting ethanol imports to the US, following his first meeting with President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

The Brazilian president, in his first visit to Washington since Mr Obama took office, said it was wrong for the US continued to levy import tariffs on Brazilian sugarcane ethanol, which is more environmentally friendly than the maize ethanol produced in the US.

"I also can't understand [why] while the world is concerned with climate change and with carbon emissions ... clean fuel also gets tariffs," Mr da Silva said.

The issue has become a bone of contention between the two countries, with Brazil threatening litigation at the World Trade Organisation over the US's 54 cent per gallon import tariff.

Brazil has also used the issue to counter US demands for it to cut to zero its own tariffs on so-called "environmental goods" such as renewable energy technology, accusing Washington of hypocrisy.

Mr Obama paid tribute to Brazil's leadership in biofuel production and said that his administration would continue to work with Brazil on the issue. But he added: "It's not going to change overnight."

Mr Obama also played down the chances of a swift resolution to the beleaguered so-called "Doha round" of trade talks, which has stalled on disputes over agricultural tariffs and subsidies and industrial goods protection.

"It may be difficult for us to finalize a whole host of trade deals in the midst of an economic crisis like this one, although we have committed to sitting down with our Brazilian counterparts to find ways that we can start closing the gap on the Doha Round and other potential trade agreements," Mr Obama said.

"I'm optimistic that we'll be able to make progress," he said. "It may not happen immediately."

Brazil's highly competitive farmers have pushed for a rapid conclusion to the round and for cuts in US farm subsidies and European farm tariffs to expand their export markets. But resistance from the US and reluctance from developing countries such as India to cut protection for farmers has led to repeated breakdowns in negotiations.

Mr da Silva agreed on Saturday that the economic crisis made it harder to reach a deal in Doha.

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Chicken growers face EPA crackdown

Permit requirements to limit pollution stricter than Md. regulations

By Timothy B. Wheeler

March 15, 2009

The Environmental Protection Agency has told Maryland's poultry farmers it intends to enforce for the first time federal pollution rules governing chicken manure - a crackdown that has surprised and angered growers while pleasing environmentalists who've long complained about agricultural runoff fouling Chesapeake Bay.

At meetings recently on the Eastern Shore, EPA officials told several hundred farmers that they must get federal pollution-discharge permits if any manure from their flocks is washing off their land into drainage ditches and streams. More than half of the state's 800 poultry farmers have filed notices to get the permits, state officials say.

The federal permits are tougher in key respects than what Maryland has so far been unable to establish for its poultry farmers. State regulations and permit requirements developed last year to cover about 200 of the largest chicken farms are on hold because of appeals filed both by environmentalists and farmers.

"It's nothing more than a lot of red tape," grumbled David Wood, 62, a farmer who raises 435,000 chickens near Denton in Caroline County. While he said he'll do what it takes to comply, he predicted that some small poultry farmers may quit because they can't afford - or won't be willing - to alter their operations to meet the federal requirements. "They're not going to mess with it," he said.

But EPA officials say greater scrutiny of poultry farms is warranted because of the vast quantities of manure they generate on the low-lying Delmarva Peninsula, close to the Chesapeake and its tributaries.

Agriculture is the largest source of the nutrients degrading the bay's water quality, according to the EPA's bay program, with runoff of manure and chemical fertilizers responsible for 42 percent of the nitrogen and 46 percent of the phosphorus. Such nutrients stimulate the growth of algae blooms and a vast oxygen-starved "dead zone" in the bay unsuitable for fish, oysters and crabs.

For Maryland farmers, who have resisted government regulation, the permits are a costly headache. Growers will be required to submit comprehensive reports on how they handle and store the manure produced by their chickens, and list how much they're using as fertilizer on crops and what precautions they're taking to keep it from getting into nearby streams.

The federal regulations also could require many to change their farming practices. The rules sharply restrict the amount of time they can stockpile manure in their fields before working it into the soil and require them to leave much larger swaths of land uncultivated along drainage ditches and waterways.



Anything the farmers report to the federal government is open to public inspection, which farmers have balked at in the past.

Scott Edwards, legal director of the Waterkeeper Alliance, welcomed the federal action. He said the rules should not be a great burden for farmers, and that the benefits for the bay are worth the costs of complying.

"To me, it's a no-brainer," he said. "You shouldn't be dumping your manure within a few feet of a ditch or gully that will carry it to a waterway. They can't do that - they should never have been able to do that."

State officials and farming representatives say the rush by Maryland farmers to get permits came after EPA officials reinterpreted a regulation, essentially declaring that if rainfall drains away from chicken houses into ditches and streams, it's likely carrying manure and needs to be controlled. Previously, almost all chicken farms had been considered exempt unless their animals were outdoors or the manure stored in lagoons.

"EPA's just really targeting poultry right now," complained Valerie Connelly, legislative director for the Maryland Farm Bureau.

But EPA officials counter that they are just clarifying a six-year-old regulation requiring pollution permits for many farms with large herds or flocks of animals, called "concentrated animal feeding operations," or CAFOs.

"CAFOs are a national priority for EPA, and they're also a regional priority due to the impacts on the bay," said David McGuigan, the agency's associate director of permits and enforcement for the Mid-Atlantic. "So we have to have a relatively aggressive compliance assurance program. Part of that is ... ensuring people obtain permits if they need them. A law that is not examined or enforced is a law that is not obeyed."

Shore farmers contend that the EPA is coming down harder on them than on chicken growers elsewhere. Rep. Frank M. Kratovil Jr., a Democrat who represents the Shore, said he has met with EPA officials to inquire if the policies are being applied evenly nationwide.

"We are not doing anything different on the Eastern Shore than EPA would do in any other part of the country," said Allison Wiedeman, the EPA official in Washington who oversees the rules nationwide. She said many poultry farmers in the Southeast are also being advised that they need to get permits.

The federal rules say farmers may not pile manure in their fields for more than 14 days, after which they must cover it or work it into the soil. Farmers also must not spread manure within 35 to 100 feet of ditches or waterways.

Wood, the Caroline farmer, said he does not have enough space in his barns to keep all the manure his birds produce in the winter. He grows wheat, corn, soybeans and barley on 700 acres, and says the waterway setback requirements could sharply limit the amount of land on which farmers could raise crops.

McGuigan said regulators would consider easing the manure storage and setback requirements on a case-by-case basis.

The federal requirements are confusing to many Maryland farmers, who'd spent the past year attending meetings to debate the state's attempt to regulate poultry farms.

State environmental officials softened the reporting and manure-handling requirements of those rules to ease farmers' complaints, but the rules were put on hold to review complaints from the Waterkeeper Alliance that they were too lax. The state had proposed to let farmers leave manure in the open up to 90 days, for instance, and would permit manure within 10 feet of drainage ditches.

A Shore poultry farmer also challenged the rules as too strict, but he has since withdrawn his appeal, a state

spokeswoman said.

"We're all still trying to figure out what's going on," said Lee Richardson, 38, a poultry farmer in Willards, in Wicomico County. "It's nerve-racking."

Adding to farmers' anxiety and confusion is that there are just a handful of agricultural consultants nationwide who are certified to prepare the comprehensive nutrient-management plans required by the federal rules.

Ted Cordrey, one of those consultants who is based in Delaware, said he returned recently from vacation to find 80 phone messages from farmers wanting to hire him.

The plans themselves can cost several thousand dollars to prepare for large poultry farms, especially if they use the manure to fertilize crops. Farmers can get federal funds to cover most of the plan preparation cost, as well as of any pollution controls they find they need, but the grower still has to pay some out of pocket.

In addition, the Maryland Department of the Environment had proposed to charge an annual fee of up to \$1,200 to oversee large poultry farm compliance with the federal rules. That fee has been waived for now and is being reconsidered, said Robert Summers, deputy environment secretary.

Bill Satterfield, executive director of the trade group Delmarva Poultry Industry, argues that the state should drop its rules for chicken farms in light of the federal crackdown.

Edwards, of the Waterkeeper Alliance, said he hoped the large poultry companies for whom farmers raise chickens under contract would help them comply with the new requirements.

The companies "need to step up and take responsibility for what ultimately is their waste, not the farmers," he said.

tighter permit requirements

- EPA rules apply to more than 400 farms. State covered about 200.
- EPA rules allow open storage of manure for 14 days. State rules allowed 90 days.
- EPA requires 35-foot buffer from ditches or streams. State buffer was 10 feet.

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Drought a \$1 billion disaster in Texas

By Betsy Blaney, AP Agriculture Writer

LUBBOCK, Texas — Agriculture officials said Friday that ranchers in the nation's largest cattle-producing state have already lost nearly \$1 billion because of Texas' ongoing drought.

Officials said cattle raisers have lost \$829 million since last summer, \$569 million of that since November.

Recent rains across much of the state, though welcome, came too late. Ranchers have spent substantial money on hay and supplemental feed, the cost of trucking in additional hay. The drought losses also include failed wheat crops usually used for grazing.

All of Texas is in some stage of drought for the second straight week, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor map released Thursday.

DROUGHT MAP: Texas

Worst hit is Central Texas and the Hill Country, where exceptional drought, the most severe designation, has persisted for months and is the driest area in the U.S.

Texas just had its driest December-February stretch on record.

More than 60% of the state's beef cows are in counties with severe to exceptional drought — the three worst stages.

Losses will likely grow past \$1 billion in the next two months as livestock producers continue to make supplemental feed purchases or sell cattle and calves in a declining market, said David Anderson, an agriculture marketing economist with Texas AgriLife Extension Service.

In 2006, drought-related crop and livestock losses were the state's worst for a single year, totaling \$4.1 billion.

The effects of the drought on livestock aren't short-term, Anderson said.

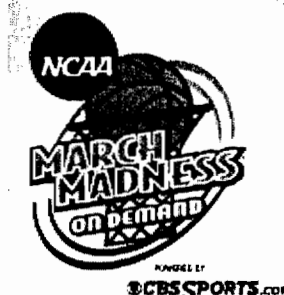
"Drought results in reduced conception rates and calf crops the next year," he said. "The lack of feed results in lower cattle sale weights. Range and pasture recovery from drought can take multiple years and can result in reduced stocking rates while ranges recover."

No crop loss estimates are possible now, though South Texas farmers have probably planted some and Central Texas producers would just now be planting, he said.

"My impression is, yes people were planting," Anderson said. "You have to plant anyway before the deadline for crop insurance purposes."

Rancher Betsy Ross was grateful for the rain at her Blacklands spread near Granger, about 45 miles northeast of Austin.

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"Thank goodness, thank goodness," the 72-year-old rancher said. "I think it's really disastrous if we don't continue to get rain."

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Los Angeles Times



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From the Los Angeles Times

SUPERMARKETS

Checkout alert system for recalled foods sought

Consumer advocates say supermarket scanners should be programmed to trigger an alert when shoppers try to buy a recalled product. Some chains already are doing this.

By Marc Lifsher

March 16, 2009

Reporting from Sacramento — With more food recalls happening weekly, consumer advocates, supermarket chains and legislators are exploring better ways to stop the sale of tainted food, and one plan under discussion by lawmakers in Sacramento involves using supermarket checkout scanners to help.

Programming supermarket computers to trigger an alert every time a recalled product is scanned at the checkout counter could be an easy way to better protect shoppers from buying and eating tainted foods, consumer groups say.

A system of automatic warnings, they say, would help ensure that food, such as the more than 2,600 recently recalled brands of ice cream, cake mixes, snacks and other items possibly laced with salmonella bacteria, are stopped at the point of purchase.

"Once an item has made it out of the plant, off the truck and onto the shelves and is recalled, it is unreasonable to think an individual stocker can go through every shelf and identify every item that could pose a threat," state Sen. Dean Florez (D-Shafter) said. "Grocers have the tools at their disposal to give consumers the final line of defense they need and expect."

Florez, who has made food safety a top issue, recently introduced legislation that would give supermarket scanners an important role in recall efforts.

Some consumers, especially those with young children, say they like the idea of putting an extra buffer between their families and dangerous food products.

"As a mother, it's really upsetting to think I could be buying products that are tainted and dangerous to my children," said Fiona Hutton of Studio City, a working parent with two young children. "This sounds like something that could be a common-sense solution."

Although the influential California Grocers Assn. is taking a wait-and-see stance on the proposal, some major retailers already are exploring the idea themselves. Cincinnati-based Kroger Co., which operates 260 Ralphs and 118 Food for Less stores in California, has programmed its computers to issue a "hard halt" to any transaction involving a recalled product.

"Our register would not allow us to sell it to you," Ralphs spokeswoman Kendra Doyel said.

Ralphs also uses its so-called loyalty-reward cards, which track a holder's purchases, to warn participating customers via a notice on their sales receipt that they might have recalled and possibly dangerous foods sitting in their pantries.

About half of all food retailers in the nation have access to detailed customer data from loyalty-card programs,

said Bill Greer, a spokesman for the Food Marketing Institute, an Arlington, Va., trade group that accounts for three-quarters of the industry.

Costco Wholesale Corp. tentatively supports the checkout alert system and "anything we can do to protect the consumer," said Craig Wilson, assistant vice president for food safety and quality assurance of the Issaquah, Wash.-based warehouse chain.

For the last decade, Costco has been using information from shoppers' membership cards to contact customers by mail and by telephone about recalled products they bought in previous months, Wilson said.

Costco said it placed 1.5 million to 2 million automated calls to alert customers who bought products that were part of the continuing recall of food containing peanuts processed by Peanut Corp. of America.

The Jan. 13 recall covers products containing peanut butter, peanut paste and peanut granules processed by Peanut Corp.'s plant in Blakely, Ga., since July 1.

Peanut Corp.'s products are widely used by hundreds of food manufacturers in both retail brands and bulk products sold to institutional consumers.

An inspection by the Food and Drug Administration found salmonella present in the plant. The outbreak, first identified in September, has been linked to at least nine deaths and more than 600 illnesses.

Since then, the federal government has launched a criminal investigation of Peanut Corp., and the firm subsequently filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy, which involves a liquidation of assets.

That such a massive outpouring of tainted foods could make it all the way up the supply chain and into consumers' stomachs is evidence that the federal government's inspection program is "completely broken" and that a last line of protection is needed at the supermarket checkout counter, said Elisa Odabashian, West Coast director for Consumers Union, the nonprofit publisher of Consumer Reports magazine.

"There are tons of products out there still being sold in stores," she said. "Most Americans, while they know about the salmonella outbreak, don't have a clue about what kinds of products are involved."

The fact that some supermarkets already are snagging recalled products that hadn't been cleared off shelves is proof that adding a new level of consumer protection is not impossible, Florez said.

"If supermarkets can get the price right with a scanner, then they certainly can identify recalled products," he said.

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Senate Agriculture Committee Will Vote On CFTC Nominee Mon

By Sarah N. Lynch
Of DOW JONES NEWSWIRES
215 words
13 March 2009
14:33
Dow Jones News Service
English
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WASHINGTON (Dow Jones)--The U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee is planning to vote on Gary Gensler's nomination to chair the Commodity Futures Trading Commission late Monday, a committee spokesman said Friday.

The vote will likely take place in a private meeting after the U.S. Senate finishes voting on several unrelated issues. If the committee approves Gensler's nomination, it will go before the full U.S. Senate for consideration.

Gensler, a former assistant secretary and undersecretary of the U.S. Treasury Department, has pledged support for mandated clearing for certain over-the-counter derivatives and vowed to do more to rein in excessive speculation if confirmed as chairman.

For a while some Senate Democrats, including Senate Agriculture Chairman **Tom Harkin**, D-Iowa, said they had concerns about Gensler's background because he was involved in discussions surrounding a 2000 law which deregulated swaps during his tenure at the Treasury Dept.

Following his confirmation hearing in late February, however, Harkin signaled he would support Gensler and said he thought the committee would likely give Gensler the green light.

-By Sarah N. Lynch, Dow Jones Newswires; 202-862-6634; sarah.lynch@dowjones.com [03-13-09 1433ET]

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115

US Senate panel plans Monday vote on CFTC chairman

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WASHINGTON, March 13 (Reuters) - The Senate Agriculture Committee plans to vote on Monday on President Barack Obama's nomination of Gary Gensler for chairman of the agency that oversees U.S. futures markets, said a spokesman on Friday.

The panel was expected to approve the nomination, which would allow a Senate vote on putting Gensler in charge of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission. Gensler, 51, is a former Goldman Sachs executive and was a high-ranking Treasury official during the Clinton era.

During a hearing on Feb. 25, Gensler said he supported position limits on physical commodities, that clearing should be mandatory for standardized over-the-counter derivatives and that he opposed a merger of the CFTC and the Securities and Exchange Commission, the regulator of equities markets. (Reporting by **Charles Abbott**; Editing by Christian Wiessner)

CFTC-USA/GENSLER|LANGEN|ABN|C|GRO|SOF|MTL|E|RBN|U|RNP|DNP|PCO|PCM

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VISALIA JOURNAL

Farmers Lead a Bid to Create 2 Californias

By MALIA WOLLAN

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VISALIA, Calif. — After nearly 90 years on the farm, Virgil Rogers has suffered through all manner of agricultural agita, from colicky cows to oscillating milk prices to drought, both past and present.

But Mr. Rogers's newest source of consternation, he says, is some fellow Californians.

"Those Hollywood types don't have any idea what's going on out here on the farms," said Mr. Rogers, a retired dairyman from Visalia, the county seat in a Central Valley region where cows far outnumber people.

So it is that in recent weeks Mr. Rogers, whose previous political involvement amounted to little more than writing a check to a favored candidate — has suddenly become a leader in a secessionist movement bent on cleaving California in two.

But while the plan is not new — the idea of two Californias has been floated dozens of times — the motivations and geographical scissor-work are. Frustrated by what they call uninformed urban voters dictating faulty farm policy, Mr. Rogers and the other members of the movement have proposed splitting off 13 counties on the state's coast, leaving the remaining 45, mostly inland, counties as the "real" California.

The reason, they say, is that people in those coastal counties, which include San Francisco and Los Angeles, simply do not understand what life is like in areas where the sea breezes do not reach.

"They think fish are more important than people, that pigs are treated mean and chickens should run loose," said Mr. Rogers, who said he hitched a ride in 1940 to Visalia from Oklahoma to escape the Dust Bowl, with his wife and baby son in tow. "City people just don't know what it takes to get food on their table."

The final straw for folks like Mr. Rogers was Proposition 2, a ballot measure in November that banned the tight confinement of egg-laying hens, veal calves and sows. While many food activists and politicians in the state hailed the vote as proof of consumers' increasing interest in where their food comes from, the proposition's passage has angry farmers and their allies wanting to put the issue of secession to a vote, perhaps as soon as 2012.

"We have to ask ourselves, Is there a better way to govern this state?" asked a former Republican member of the California Assembly, Bill Maze, president and a founder of the nonprofit group, Citizens for Saving California Farming Industries, which is spearheading the secessionists' efforts. Mr. Rogers, another co-founder, is chairman of the board.

When he sat down to divvy up the counties, Mr. Maze said, he made sure to keep the large suburban and conservatively leaning counties east of Los Angeles on his side of the border, assuring a majority of the population. He plans to spend the next several years selling their residents on the benefits of secession.

Since statehood was granted in 1850, "there have been more than 200 serious-minded calls for the division of the state," said Kevin Starr, a professor of history at the [University of Southern California](#) and a former state librarian.

Agitators in northern California and southern Oregon have been angling to establish a state, which they would call Jefferson, since 1941. In 1993, the California Assembly passed a proposal to split the state in three, though it later died in the Senate. Under the United States Constitution, any such plan would require Congressional approval.

These efforts at division point to California's "cultural disjunctions," "red-blue divide" and "sectional anxiety," Mr. Starr said.

The mood for secession has also been amplified by a string of hard luck years in Central Valley cities like Visalia, 40 miles southeast of Fresno. California's agricultural heartland is at the epicenter of the foreclosure crisis, and counties there have some of the highest unemployment rates in the country. A drought has farmers scrambling for water.

Some farmers are also suspicious of the political direction in Sacramento, the state capital. In January the Senate Agriculture Committee was renamed the [Food and Agriculture Committee](#), signaling a broader, more consumer-oriented approach to agricultural policy. The committee's chairman, State Senator Dean Florez, Democrat of Fresno, finds the secession effort emblematic of larger tensions between food consumers and producers.

"Rather than split California, come sit at the table with consumers," Mr. Florez said. "The agricultural industry is in this mode that says, 'You will eat what's put in front of you,' and that's a very condescending view of consumers and eaters. If customers are changing their preferences, the industry needs to change its ways."

Food and animal rights activists here agree with Mr. Florez. "It's unfair to say consumers don't care about farmers," said Rebecca Spector of the [Center for Food Safety](#). "With the increase in food-borne illnesses, all eaters, both urban and rural, have the right to demand food that is grown in a safe and healthy way."

The secessionists have a long way to go. The group has raised only about \$12,000, a meager sum in a state where ballot campaigns come with multimillion-dollar price tags. Still, since the group unveiled its Web site, www.downsizeca.org, in mid-February, at least 150 people a day have signed up to receive information and offer their services to the cause, Mr. Maze said.


Mr. Rogers contributed \$3,000 of his savings. Most of that went to rent a booth at the World Ag Expo, an agricultural fair near Visalia, in January. Several thousand people stopped by the booth, and many left carrying fliers and wearing "Downsize California" T-shirts, all of which Mr. Rogers took as evidence of money well spent.

"I'm an old hound dog," he said. "If I'm barking up a tree, I want to know how many squirrels are up there."

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The Washington Times

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Sunday, March 15, 2009

Homelessness hitting horses

Megan Miller CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

(117)

WOODBINE, Md.

Maryland horse owners are "dumping" their unwanted livestock at 10 times the rate of last year, and the horses they're shedding are not just backyard ponies, according to informal statistics from rescue organizations.

Horse-rescue operators are wrestling with a staggering number of horses in need of homes, a byproduct of the region's crumbling economy, struggling racetracks and the closure of U.S. slaughter plants.

Kathy Howe, president of the Days End Farm Horse Rescue in Woodbine, keeps records of every call the farm receives from owners trying to surrender horses.

In February 2008, Days End received eight calls involving eight horses. In February 2009, Ms. Howe recorded 17 calls involving 101 horses - a tenfold increase in just one year. Of the 101, 47 were thoroughbreds.

The majority of callers say they're surrendering their horses for financial reasons, Ms. Howe said. About one-third of the callers gave that reason in 2008.

Other rescue operators also have seen a dramatic increase in owner surrenders.

"I turn away five to six horses a week, and it used to be five a month," said Elle Williams, executive director of HorseNet Horse Rescue in Mount Airy. "Within the last year, it's gotten really bad."

"Most of the equine rescues are filled to capacity, and I get calls at least twice a week," said Pat Douglas, founder of the Pheasant Hill Equine Foundation in Adamstown. "I would definitely say the economy has something to do with the amount of horses needing homes."

Rescue horses come from different backgrounds. Some are pets or riding horses that people can no longer afford to keep.

But Nicky Ratliff, executive director of the Carroll County Humane Society, thinks many are racing or show horses no longer wanted in the industry for financial or performance reasons.

"Any time that you are using animals for any kind of competition, a certain percentage of those animals will never be able to compete on the necessary level," Ms. Ratliff said. "You're only going to take the cream of the crop. You see how they perform, and the ones that don't, don't have another use."

The thoroughbred industry is so prominent in Maryland that several horse rescues focus only on those castoffs, including Summerwinds Stables in Warwick. Founder

Elena DiSilvestro said there's been a huge increase in the number of horses brought to her attention just within the past three to six months.

"There almost has to be a level of responsibility that starts with the race industry, where they say, 'Hey, eventually this horse is not going to be able to race anymore,'" Ms. DiSilvestro said. "I think they have to say, 'When this horse's racing career is done, what is his future?'"

Some measures are now being taken at a national level. The National Thoroughbred Racing Association is implementing new standards for its member racetracks that would, among other things, require them to have a program in place to assist with the aftercare, or second career, of thoroughbreds, according to spokesman Eric Wing.

"We've got to do more on that front to successfully transition the thoroughbreds off the track," Mr. Wing said.

Horse racing is a troubled business in Maryland.

Major setbacks in recent months have dealt serious blows to the state's racing industry. Magna Entertainment Corp., owner of Pimlico Race Course and Laurel Park, filed for bankruptcy protection March 5. On Thursday, an Anne Arundel County Circuit judge barred the latest attempt at a slots license for Laurel Park. Slots revenue was seen as possibly the best chance at securing the solvency of Maryland tracks.

The scenario is not unique to Maryland, said Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association President Daniel Metzger. Kentucky has also been trying, so far unsuccessfully, to get slots legislation passed, and it's affecting the industry there.

"Horse owners might love their horses, but at the same time in a tough economy, if you have a horse that's not successful at the racetrack, you might need to find a way to get rid of it," Mr. Metzger said.

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REUTERS

US doctors still learning from pig brain disorder

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- * Pork workers still recovering from nerve disorder
- * Bizarre illness offers insights on autoimmune disease

By Julie Steenhuysen

CHICAGO, March 15 (Reuters) - It started with tingling in the fingers and toes, followed by weakness in the legs.

"It wasn't a normal neurologic illness," said Dr. Aaron DeVries, an epidemiologist with the Minnesota Department of Health who helped lead the state's investigation of a mysterious condition that sickened 18 workers at a Southern Minnesota pork processing plant.

Now, more than a year after their symptoms started, the workers are responding to treatment for the nerve illness that is teaching doctors new lessons about autoimmune disease.

DeVries got involved after a cluster of workers at Quality Pork Producers Inc in Austin, Minnesota, became too weak to visit the fourth-floor health clinic, leading the plant's nurse to alert health authorities.

"The most common denominator was people saying, 'We can't make it up the stairs,'" he said.

Most had been assigned to the head table, where they used compressed air to blow the brains out of pig skulls.

"We observed how brain material was both splattered around on other machines and other workers close by," DeVries said. "But there was also smaller material that remained in the air."

It turns out that all of the sickened workers had been exposed in some way to a fine mist of pig brain matter that triggered a new type of autoimmune disease.

In the 15 months since their illness was first reported, all have responded to immune therapy but they continue to have symptoms and many have mild pain.

'EXPERIMENT OF NATURE'

"This whole thing was a man-made experiment of nature," said Dr. Daniel Lachance of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, who will present his latest findings on the pork workers' disease at a neurology meeting next month.

"It presents an opportunity to understand a phenomenon that is potentially important to all of us -- autoimmune disease," Lachance said in a telephone interview.

Lachance and Dr. James Dyck of Mayo worked closely with health department doctors to learn as much as possible about what made the workers sick.

While they now believe it was an autoimmune response, it took scores of interviews with plant workers, numerous tests and months of observations to make that call.

2012

They considered infectious agents such as prions -- proteins known to wreak havoc on the brain in diseases such as **mad cow** and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

But the symptoms did not fit. "Prion illnesses are almost uniformly progressive. People get sicker and sicker until they die from it," DeVries said.

Although they are still doing tests, they believe the workers developed antibodies to proteins from the pig brain tissue. Testing shows all have a unique antibody not seen before.

"What happens is our body makes a specific antibody and the antibody is targeting this foreign protein," DeVries said.

"By accident, it also attaches to a protein within our own body. This is, in a certain sense, collateral damage."

The researchers hope further studies on this disease will aid understanding of other autoimmune disorders, where the trigger is not known. "Even though this is an isolated incident, it is certainly going to open up doors in neurology research," DeVries said. (Editing by Maggie Fox and Eric Walsh)

BRAIN-PIGS|LANGEN|G|RBN|ABN|C|GRO|MTL|SOF|AFA|CSA|LBY|RWSA|RWS|REULB|GNS|RNP|PGE|PCM|SXNA

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News

farmers reap loss of trust By Phillip O'Connor • St. Louis Post-Dispatch martinsburg, mo. Like the railroad tracks that cut through the center of this quiet farm town, a Wall Street-style financial scandal is dividing many who live here. A trusted advisor

By Phillip O'Connor • St. Louis Post-Dispatch

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This wasn't a slick tycoon who manipulated stock portfolios, but a well-liked farm wife who bought and sold the corn, soybeans and wheat grown by her friends and neighbors.

Now, just like those who trusted Bernard Madoff, who pleaded guilty last week to bilking investors of billions, many of the hundreds of farmers who trusted Cathy Gieseke face financial disaster.

Late last month, state authorities seized the assets of T.J. Gieseke Farms and Trucking after a routine audit raised several red flags about Gieseke's grain-trading business. Both the Audrain County prosecutor and the attorney general's office are considering criminal charges and civil action.

"It's kind of like the Midwest Madoff to a certain extent," Department of Agriculture official Chris Klenklen said. "There's a lot of indications that a lot of fraud was involved."

Gieseke transported crops from grain farmers, promising that she would later pay them a high return for their yield. And, for a while, she delivered on her word. But the collapse of her company has many folks in northeastern Missouri speculating that Gieseke was operating a pyramid scheme, whereby she used money from new investors to pay higher returns to earlier investors.

So far, more than 140 farmers expect to be hit with losses that could total more than \$15 million. Over the past decade, fewer than 100 Missouri farmers have been victims of grain fraud. That number could more than double with the Gieseke case, Klenklen said.

Soon after the state seizure of her company, Gieseke was hospitalized for an undisclosed treatment. She could not be reached for comment.

"She's right now trying to sort out kind of what the state is alleging," said her attorney, Travis Noble, who said Gieseke was living at an undisclosed location.

"She has a pretty compelling story about what transpired," Noble said. "I can't really say yet what that is. (It) is something that is not her fault. The truth will come out."

'too good to be true'

Gieseke, 44, grew up in the area. She serves on the local school board and was active with her two daughters in 4-H.

Acquaintances said there were no indications she lived a lavish lifestyle. Known for a salty tongue, she lives in a modest farm home off a gravel road a few miles north of town. She drives a Ford Expedition. She did most business by phone from a home office that shared space with a washer and dryer.

"She spent some money, but not to the tune of millions of dollars," said Steve Hobbs, a **farmer** who grew up with Gieseke and her family.

Gieseke and her husband ran the grain and trucking business for more than a decade before he died in 2007 from cancer. That year, the company reported about \$30 million in sales, making it one of the largest

companies of its kind in Missouri.

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Gieseke's company would promise to pay farmers for their grain in advance. In some cases, she paid 30 percent above what the area elevators were paying.

Once delivered and sold, a grain elevator company would pay Gieseke, who then would issue a check to the **farmer**.

"Her business plan worked real well as long as the grain prices were going up," Klenklen said. "But when the prices dropped like they have the last six months, that operation doesn't seem to work very well."

Even many who lost substantial amounts say Gieseke alone can't be responsible and point fingers at Archer Daniels Midland, the giant grain company. Farmers said Gieseke often told them she was doing business with ADM, which seemingly enhanced her credibility.

"Everybody assumed she had a contract with ADM, and the volume she did is why she could pay a higher price," said Derek Stuckenschneider, who claims Gieseke owes his grandfather \$10,000 for soybeans.

ADM said it did business with Gieseke but had no forward contracts with her company that would have guaranteed her a price for future deliveries. Any grain she sold the company would have been purchased at the spot price on the day it sold.

Farmers should have been alarmed when Gieseke began delaying payments, Klenklen said. But no one contacted the agriculture department. He speculates some may have been reluctant to put an end to what had been a profitable venture.

Some of Gieseke's customers stirred animosity when they boasted about the prices. Others, however, said they had their suspicions and avoided doing business with her.

"Quite frankly, when people told me the deals they were getting, I thought it was too good to be true," said Hobbs, a Republican House member. "When I can't figure out how to get even close to that price, ... something had to be going on."

Still, as word of the profits spread, so did the number of Gieseke's customers. Eventually, she had a client base that covered an area east of Highway 63 and north of Interstate 70 and stretching into Illinois.

"The whole thing boiled down to greed," said Bill Fennwald, another business owner in town. "Somebody is scared somebody else is getting something that they're not."

'a hell of a salesman'

On a damp, overcast morning last week, farmers in blue jeans and ball caps, many carrying briefcases or large manila envelopes, trickled into the Knights of Columbus Hall to file claims for their losses with the department of agriculture. Many didn't want their names published.

"I don't want people to know how stupid I am," one **farmer** explained. During the three days the department spent in town, 142 farmers filed such claims, and officials expect to receive more before a March 31 deadline.

In a close-knit community where families date back generations and reputations are guarded, many farmers speculated that some won't even bother. "They'd rather lose the money than be embarrassed," Hobbs said.

Klenklen, the agriculture department official, said he was unnerved to find that so many farmers lacked signed agreements that guaranteed the prices Gieseke promised.

"I'm going to commit to sell all my crops to you for the next four years and I don't need anything in writing from you?" Klenklen said. "I struggle with that. She must have been a hell of a salesman."

So far, state officials have recovered about \$100,000 owed to Gieseke for grain she delivered. The state also collected a \$297,000 letter of credit required for her grain dealer's license. Gieseke was able to empty a \$560,000 company bank account before the state could seize the money, Klenklen said. Investigators are looking for any assets to sell.

"Our priority is to get as much money back for the farmers as possible," said Travis Ford, spokesman for Attorney General Chris Koster. "We'll worry about punishments and penalties down the road."

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Most farmers said they expected to receive pennies on the dollars for their losses. "Like suing the tooth fairy," one farmer said.

The loss of income comes at a crucial time, when taxes are due and many are just weeks away from planting corn. Some farmers said they were cutting back on expenses, putting off equipment purchases and meeting with lenders.

When grain prices soared last summer Linus Rothermich, who farms 900 acres in Callaway County, agreed to sell almost his entire crop to Giesecker for \$358,000, substantially more than anyone else was offering. After he delivered the grain and a week before he expected to collect, the state seized the company.

"If I had a check from her, I'd have all my debts paid, money to pay taxes and maybe even enough to start thinking about putting some money away for retirement," Rothermich said.

Rothermich, 44, said he had had to take out a loan against land he had finished paying off six years ago, to continue farming. "Now I'm in a deep hole to dig out of."

'neighbor against neighbor'

If the losses are as large as rumored, many expect farmers will be forced to sell land or other assets, restructure loans or worse.

"Now they're in a situation of talking with their banker about whether they can even go to the field," Klenklen said.

Under bankruptcy laws, a judge could seek to recoup millions of dollars that Giesecker paid to farmers in the last 90 days, a time of year when large amounts of money change hands in the grain business.

"If that happens, it's going to pit neighbor against neighbor," Klenklen said. "It has to be a dilemma that everybody has on their minds."

Even more unsettling to some, if fraud is discovered, the court could go back and seek to recover even more money that Giesecker paid out.

"There's a lot of uncertainty," Hobbs said. "It's just a mess. An absolute mess."

Meanwhile, Hobbs wants a task force named that would discuss the establishment of a fund to cover such losses and legislation that would raise the minimum bond requirement for the state's 400 or so grain dealers, about half of which are elevators.

Regardless of the outcome, many say the controversy is bound to change the way business is done in a community where for as long as anyone can remember a person's word was considered his or her bond.

Said Hobbs: "Unfortunately, the community will be the worse for it because the amount of trust people put in people's words has been shaken really hard."

deals made on a handshake Farmers agreed, with no written contract, to sell grain to T.J. Giesecker Farms and Trucking.

A pyramid scheme? Many Missouri farmers lost heavily even as their neighbors and friends cashed in.

'It's kind of like the Midwest Madoff to a certain extent. There's a lot of indications that a lot of fraud was involved.' Department of Agriculture official Chris Klenklen

PHOTO - Linus Rothermich contemplates Tuesday what chore he is going to do next on the farm owned by his father, Ray Rothermich, near Auxvasse, Mo. Linus Rothermich said he never runs out of projects. Photos by J.B. Forbes | Post-Dispatch PHOTO - Linus Rothermich rolls up to his farmhouse near Auxvasse, Mo., Tuesday in one of his old tractors. He had planned to buy a new tractor from money he was going to make in grain sales. Now the money and plans are gone. PHOTO - ABOVE: Richard Schlueter (left), an auditor with the Missouri Department of Agriculture's Grain Regulatory Services, talks Tuesday with farmers Linus Rothermich (center) and his father, Ray Rothermich, at the Knights of Columbus meeting hall in Martinsburg, Mo. The Rothermichs, like many other farmers, had given grain to Cathy Giesecker, whose company has been seized. LEFT: Linus Rothermich and his dog Duke ride through his farm on Tuesday. He said he was worrying about how to pay his income taxes without the money he was promised for his grain. Photos by

Des Moines Register.com

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March 15, 2009

Brasher: Swapping subsidies to help climate is tough sell

by PHILIP BRASHER
pbrasher@dmreg.com

Washington, D.C. - The Barack Obama administration would like to convince farmers that they can replace their federal crop subsidies with payments for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It isn't an easy sell.

It's not just that the administration needs the budget savings from cutting farm subsidies. The White House also needs the support of farmers - and their allies in the Senate - to win passage of a cap-and-trade system to impose limits on carbon emissions.

The only way to get the agriculture sector behind a cap-and-trade bill is to convince farmers that the benefits they would receive outweigh the pain that's likely to come in the form of higher prices for products of oil and fuel, including diesel and fertilizer.

So far, farm groups aren't ready to buy the deal.

The administration's proposal to phase out some farm subsidies already appears dead in Congress. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack tried to sell farmers on the idea that they could make up the money from future carbon payments.

Vilsack said last week that there are unlimited opportunities for farmers to benefit from a cap-and-trade system "so long as agriculture is at the table" when Congress writes the law.

He's telling farm groups that carbon payments could reach an astounding \$100 billion a year, based on a report by the 25 x '25 Steering Committee, a group promoting renewable energy. By comparison, the Department of Agriculture paid farmers \$12 billion in subsidies last year. The nation's net farm income in 2008 was \$89 billion.

There are major unanswered questions as to how and whether farms could qualify for such payments.

One way farmers could get them is by stopping or sharply reducing their tillage, keeping plant matter in the soil, or by converting cropland to grass.

But many farmers already follow no-till practices and may not qualify for payments. The whole point of the cap-and-trade system is to reduce future greenhouse gas emissions, so why pay farmers for emission reductions they've already made through no-till practices? Environmentalists argue that payments should be restricted to new reductions.

Also, what about growers who farm in areas less suitable to no-till practices - flat regions such as north-central Iowa that drain poorly? How are they motivated to support a cap-and-trade plan?

Another key issue is enforcement. Who will make sure farmers are doing what they're paid to do?

"The entire debate around climate change has a number of key issues that have to be resolved," said Jon Doggett, a lobbyist for the National Corn Growers Association.

"As we go to the Hill and start posing these questions to congressional staff, they're always astounded about how many questions need to be answered," he said.

The nation's largest farm group, the American Farm Bureau Federation, has been especially skeptical of cap-and-trade legislation. Energy prices are almost certain to "go up far in excess" of whatever

payments farmers receive, the organization's president, Bob Stallman said recently.

"Everything looks sort of negative (for farmers) with regard to climate-change legislation, as opposed to any positives," he said.

A good measure of where farm country is on the issue should come in a few weeks. The House Agriculture Committee plans to hold hearings this spring and survey farm organizations, universities and businesses.

The committee doesn't have jurisdiction over the legislation. It's under the House Energy and Commerce Committee, led by liberal California Democrat Henry Waxman.

But the agriculture committee does plan to write a bill of its own to define how agriculture is treated.

That alone is a sign of how much is at stake on this issue for the farm lobby. And how tough of a job the administration has on its hands.

Additional Facts

How cap-and-trade would impact Iowa

A cap-and-trade program would force industry to reduce its use of fossil fuels by imposing caps on emissions of greenhouse gas emissions. Electric utilities, oil refiners and other companies that exceed the caps would have to reduce their emissions or buy credits. Those credits could come from farmers and others who reduce emissions through such measures as storing carbon in the soil or generating alternative energy.

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DOW JONES

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Life. Captured daily.
The Sacramento Bee
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EDITORIALS

Pelosi must stand up for lands bill; AG PANEL'S CHIEF GROVELS TO GUN LOBBY ON KEY BIPARTISAN DEAL

569 words

13 March 2009

The Sacramento Bee

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English

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Here's an urgent task for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi: Remove Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., as chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. The need became clear on Wednesday, when Peterson was instrumental in narrowly defeating a landmark public lands bill that was the result of years of bipartisan compromise.

The Senate passed this highly popular bill in January on a 73 to 21 vote. House members voted 244-182 in favor of the bill -- two votes short of a needed two-thirds majority.

The problem: Peterson helped hold this noncontroversial bill hostage to amendments being pushed by the National Rifle Association. Specifically, the bipartisan Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (Senate Bill 22) was held up because the NRA wanted to attach an amendment that would create a law allowing concealed, loaded weapons in national parks.

For a committee chairman to allow the narrow agenda of a special interest group to take precedence over a broad-based bill in the national interest is unacceptable -- particularly for someone who chairs a committee overseeing many of the nation's public lands.

Pelosi can't just let this pass. There have to be consequences.

For us in California, the stakes are huge.

The bill includes the landmark San Joaquin River Restoration settlement, years in the making.

It has several projects to increase water supply and enhance watershed quality.

It adds land to the national wilderness system (including acres bordering Yosemite, Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks; the Hoover Wilderness near Bridgeport in Mono County; and a new Pleasant View Ridge Wilderness Area in the eastern Sierra and San Gabriel mountains).

It creates, finally, a National Landscape **Conservation** System (which includes the King Range National **Conservation** Area along the Lost Coast; the North Fork of the American River; and the Headwaters Forest Reserve of redwoods).

All of these represent months and years of bipartisan give-and-take, resulting in fragile deals that could be undone with delays.

It's no secret that for the last five years, the NRA has been trying to change rules that have been in place since the 1960s, and updated in 1983 during the Reagan era, that prevent concealed, loaded guns in the national parks.

In the waning days of the Bush presidency, agency bureaucrats did the NRA's bidding with a last-minute rule change. Now the NRA wants Congress to pass it into law before the Obama administration gets a chance to overturn the Bush rule.

House leaders must insist on a clean public lands bill -- and take up gun issues as stand-alone bills with

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separate votes.

Of 53 California House members, 38 voted for the public lands bill -- all the Democrats and Republicans David Dreier, Jerry Lewis, Howard "Buck" McKeon and Mary Bono Mack. Surprisingly, Republicans Gary Miller and George Radanovich didn't vote. Pelosi should be able to pick up their votes, as their districts benefit directly from the bill.

When she brings this bill to the floor again, Pelosi clearly needs to do a better job of counting votes. But it is in dealing with Ag Committee Chairman Peterson that Pelosi needs to send a strong message that she will not allow a landmark public lands bill to be held hostage to gun issues.

EDITORIALS / Views of the editorial board

Document SBEE000020090314e53d00006



03-13-09

Jim Miller & Dallas Tonsager picked for empty posts at USDA

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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Help for the understaffed and frustrated U.S. Department of Agriculture arrived late Friday afternoon with a White House announcement of choices for two key posts. President Barack Obama intends to nominate James W. (Jim) Miller to be Under Secretary of Agriculture for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services and Dallas P. Tonsager to be Under Secretary of Agriculture for Rural Development.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack who has complained about the long vetting process for presidential appointees welcomed the appointments, saying that "Jim Miller and Dallas Tonsager are well aware of the challenges and opportunities in rural America. They have dedicated their lives to enhancing the success and improving the lives of farmers, ranchers and those living in rural areas."

Miller currently is Chief of Staff for the National Farmers Union, a position he accepted in 1999 after serving four years as Senior Analyst for Agriculture and Trade on the majority staff of the Senate Budget Committee. Miller also has served as Chief Economist for the National Farmers Union and as Vice President for Government Relations for the National Association of Wheat Growers.

Miller operated a fourth-generation family farm in eastern Washington for over 20 years and served as President of the National Association of Wheat Growers in 1987. He was Co-Chairman of the Canada-U.S. Joint Commission on Grains, a federal commission established to resolve grain trade issues between the two countries. He is a graduate of Washington State University. He and his wife, Sandy, have two sons and two grandsons.

Tonsager currently serves as a board member of the Farm Credit Administration (FCA), a position to which he was appointed in 2004. He also is a member of the Board of Directors of the Farm Credit System Insurance Corporation. Prior to his appointment to the FCA, he was Executive Director of the South Dakota Value-Added Agriculture Development Center, where he coordinated initiatives to better serve producers who developed value-added agricultural projects.

Tonsager was appointed by President Clinton as the South Dakota State Rural Development Director in 1993 and was named one of two outstanding state directors by

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USDA in 1999. In partnership with his brother, he owns Plainview Farm in Oldham, SD, a family operation that includes corn, soybeans, wheat and hay. He is a graduate of South Dakota State University. He and his wife, Sharon, have two sons.

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03-13-09

Secretary Vilsack defends his proposed direct payment cuts

By Jon H. Harsch

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In a guest column in the *Des Moines Register* Friday the 13th, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack explained that he remains committed to his proposal to end direct farm program payments to farms with over \$500,000 in annual sales and to cap total farm program payments to any individual at \$250,000 per year.

Courageously and appropriately for an administration committed to transparency, listening well and accountability, Sec. Vilsack's OpEd includes a way to discuss the issue with him further by providing his e-mail address: AGSEC@usda.gov.

No doubt there will be further discussion since numerous organizations and members of Congress have come out strongly against the secretary's proposal which he first made at a National Association of Wheat Growers meeting on February 9th. Indicating that he is open to discussion, in press conference remarks earlier this week the secretary said that "We're absolutely willing to work with Congress. They may have better ideas and we're open to better ideas." (To read his full remarks, [click here](#), then go to the end of that article.)

In his Friday guest column, Vilsack explained that:

- "Right now, at kitchen tables across the country, families are making tough decisions as they weigh needs and consider urgencies. . . Just like these families, the government - with limited budget dollars and an inherited economic crisis - is making tough choices now for long-term gain."
- "With his 2010 budget, President Obama is doing what he pledged to do during the campaign. He's investing in our rural economy and providing farmers with protection from unforeseeable natural disasters and market disruptions."
- "Currently, marketing-loan gains and loan deficiency payments go to both producers that need them as well as those that don't, meaning there is no effective payment cap in place. In addition, direct payments are provided to large operations and done so regardless of crop prices, losses, or even whether the land is still in production."
- ". . . we must remember that direct payments were never intended to be around this long. They were temporary payments in the 1996 farm bill, and although they

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were scheduled to expire, they were included in the 2002 and 2008 farm bills, at a cost to taxpayers of about \$5.2 billion per year.”

- “I want to be clear that cutting these subsidies does not leave these farmers without a safety net. Because these cuts in farm subsidies do not affect access to other farm programs - counter-cyclical and disaster payments, crop insurance, conservation programs and the new Average Crop Revenue Election program - farmers will still have a robust safety net to protect them from volatile markets and weather conditions.”
- “In addition, the president’s drive toward energy independence and commitment to addressing climate change will provide producers with new sources of revenue - from renewable-energy production to alternate sources of income from emerging markets for clean air, clean water and wildlife habitat.”

To read Secretary Vilsack’s complete *Des Moines Register* column, [click here](http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20090313/OPINION01/903130338/1036/Opinion):
<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20090313/OPINION01/903130338/1036/Opinion>

03-13-09

Cattlemen's group plans new anti-ethanol-subsidy strategy

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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In an abrupt course change, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) announced Friday that "as part of a revamped strategy to eliminate government intervention in the renewable energy market, it is withdrawing as a member of the Food Before Fuel Coalition."

"The Food Before Fuel Coalition has been a good partner in our efforts to raise awareness about the harmful impacts of the government's excessive subsidization of the ethanol industry," says Gary Voogt, President of NCBA and rancher from Marne, MI. "As the Coalition's work broadens, however, we remain focused on a single goal: ensuring a level playing field for our cattle producers."

"Soaring feed costs and government payments to the ethanol industry are hurting small businesses and family ranches," Voogt explains. "Cattle producers don't ask for subsidies, just equal footing."

NCBA says it is working to "level the playing field for America's cattle producers" by reducing or eliminating the three government interventions for the ethanol industry: the renewable fuels mandate, the blender's tax credit, and the import tariff. NCBA continues to support a market-based approach for the production and usage of ethanol, explaining that "Our members and producers know that the marketplace offers many adequate risk management tools to utilize when building an industry. Government interventions via mandates and subsidies are never substitutes for good business practices. . . We support the development of alternative and renewable energy sources that do not compete with livestock for feed."

"After 30 years of support, corn-based ethanol is still reliant on government subsidies to be commercially viable," Voogt says. "It is time to stop propping up this industry at the expense of cattle producers."

Feedstuffs

THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER FOR AGRIBUSINESS

USDA issues final ban on downer slaughter

(3/14/2009)

Sally Schuff

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced a final rule to amend the federal meat inspection regulations to require a complete ban on the slaughter of cattle that become non-ambulatory disabled after passing initial inspection by Food Safety & Inspection Service (FSIS) inspection program personnel. The USDA announcement did not mention the date it becomes effective and calls to the agency Saturday morning were unanswered.

The final rule amends the federal meat inspection regulations to require that all cattle that are non-ambulatory disabled ("downer") cattle at any time prior to slaughter at an official establishment, including those that become non-ambulatory disabled after passing ante-mortem inspection, be condemned and properly disposed of according to FSIS regulations, the USDA statement reported.

Additionally, the final rule requires that establishments notify inspection program personnel when cattle become non-ambulatory disabled after passing the ante-mortem, or pre-slaughter, inspection.

"This rule is designed to enhance consumer confidence and humane handling standards and will provide clear guidance that non-ambulatory cattle will not be allowed to enter the human food supply," Vilsack said in a statement.

Under the final rule, cattle that become non-ambulatory disabled from an acute injury after ante-mortem inspection will no longer be eligible to proceed to slaughter as "U.S. Suspects." Instead, FSIS inspectors will tag these cattle as "U.S. Condemned" and prohibit these cattle from proceeding to slaughter. With this final rule, these cattle now must be humanely euthanized.

The full USDA statement is online at: www.usda.gov/2009/03/0060.xml

Feedstuffs

THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER FOR AGRIBUSINESS

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Obama names top FDA officials, empanels Food Safety Working Group

(3/14/2009)

Sally Schuff

In his weekly radio address Saturday morning, President Barack Obama announced the appointments of Dr. Margaret Hamburg as commissioner of the Food & Drug Administration, and Dr. Joshua Sharfstein as the principal deputy commissioner. Hamburg, a Harvard medical school graduate, is a former New York City health commissioner as well as an expert of bio-terrorism. Sharfstein is Baltimore's public health commissioner.

The President also announced creation of a new government-wide Presidential Food Safety Working Group. Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, who will become the new Health & Human Services top official upon her Senate confirmation, will join Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in chairing the new working group. It will coordinate with other agencies and senior officials to advise the President on improving coordination throughout the government, examining and upgrading food safety laws, and enforcing laws that will keep the American people safe, according to a White House statement.

In addition, the President announced two other measures. The Department of Agriculture will close a loophole to prevent non-ambulatory cattle from entering the food supply. USDA had announced that rule with the support of the American Meat Institute in 2008 but it had not been finalized. The Obama Administration also seeks to invest more than \$1 billion in FDA to substantially increase the number of food inspectors and modernize food safety labs, the President said.

Feedstuffs

THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER FOR AGRIBUSINESS

NCBA withdraws from Food Before Fuel Coalition

(3/13/2009)

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) announced today that as part of a revamped strategy to eliminate government intervention in the renewable energy market, it is withdrawing as a member of the Food Before Fuel Coalition. In a statement from the group, it said as the coalition's work broadens, NCBA wants to remain focused on ensuring a level playing field for its cattle producers.

NCBA said it is working to level the playing field for America's cattle producers by reducing or eliminating the three government interventions for the ethanol industry: the renewable fuels mandate, the blender's tax credit, and the import tariff.

The group said it continues to "support a market-based approach for the production and usage of ethanol. Our members and producers know that the marketplace offers many adequate risk management tools to utilize when building an industry. Government interventions via mandates and subsidies are never substitutes for good business practices."

"Our organization has a long history of advocacy for scientific research and development of promising new technologies," stated Gary Voogt, President of NCBA and rancher from Marne, Mich. "We support the development of alternative and renewable energy sources that do not compete with livestock for feed."

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Feedstuffs

THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER FOR AGRIBUSINESS

House bill seeks to limit animal antibiotics

(3/13/2009)

Sally Schuff

A House bill will be reintroduced that seeks to withdraw antibiotics for food animals, except for acute illness treatment, if they are also used in human medicine. The bill addresses fears that antibiotic use in animals could hasten resistance that would compromise their use in human health care.

The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act of 2009 will be introduced March 17 by Rep. Louise Slaughter (D., N.Y.), who chairs the House Rules Committee. The legislation, first introduced two years ago, is being publicized by the Pew Trusts, which conducted the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production.

The chief executive officer of Chipotle restaurants, which feature antibiotic-free meat, will be part of the teleconference announcing Slaughter's bill.

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Further restrictions announced for downer cattle slaughter

Saturday, March 14, 2009, 5:05 PM

by Tom Steever

From now on, cattle that become non-ambulatory after passing initial packing plant inspection are banned from the human food chain, according to a news release issued by the USDA Saturday.

The final rule to amend the federal meat inspection regulations was announced Saturday requiring animals that become disabled anytime prior to slaughter to be condemned, even those that have passed ante-mortem inspection.

The rule had allowed reinspection of cattle that became non-ambulatory following ante-mortem inspection, but no longer. If cattle go down after the initial inspection, they have to be euthanized.

USDA says that will free up Food Safety Inspection Service veterinarians from having to reinspect downers and should bolster public confidence in food safety and in humane handling standards.

The animal activist group the Humane Society of the United States issued a statement expressing thanks to the Obama Administration for the change.

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Two Under Secretaries of Ag named

Friday, March 13, 2009, 5:18 PM

by Bob Meyer

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President Barack Obama announced late Friday he intends to nominate James W. Miller to be Under Secretary of Agriculture for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services and Dallas P. Tonsager to be Under Secretary of Agriculture for Rural Development.

Miller is currently Chief of Staff for the National Farmers Union. The Washington State native had previously served as Chief Economist for NFU, was an agriculture and trade analyst for the Senate Budget Committee and Vice President for Government Relations with the National Association of Wheat Growers. He was NAWG president in 1987 and co-chaired the Canada-U.S. Joint Commission on Grains. He is a graduate of Washington State University.

Tonsager is currently a board member of the Farm Credit Administration and board member for the Farm Credit System Insurance Corporation. Prior to that, the South Dakota native served as Executive Director of the South Dakota Value-Added Agriculture Development Center and South Dakota Rural Development Director. Tonsager is a graduate of South Dakota State University.

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Biodiesel advocates express concerns to Vilsack

Friday, March 13, 2009, 4:06 PM

Members of the National Biodiesel Board are concerned that indirect land use assumptions may negatively impact how EPA calculates the emission profile of biodiesel produced from vegetable oil.

Those concerns were expressed to Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack this week. Biodiesel board members told Vilsack if the methodology being employed by EPA is based on inaccurate and unreliable assumptions, it could disqualify vegetable oil as a biodiesel feedstock.

RFS-2, enacted as part of the energy act of 2007, for the first time specifically requires the use of low carbon, renewable diesel replacement fuel. EPA is currently crafting the rule to implement the program. Under RFS-2, fuels must hit greenhouse gas emission reduction targets to qualify for the program.

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White House Announces USDA Appointments

Miller, Tonsager Nominated for USDA Under Secretary Positions



Jerry Hagstrom DTN Political Correspondent

[Bio](#) | [Email](#)

Fri Mar 13, 2009 05:40 PM CDT

WASHINGTON (DTN) -- The White House announced late Friday that President Barack Obama will nominate James Miller, chief of staff for the National Farmers Union, to be U.S. Department of Agriculture under secretary for farm and foreign agricultural services and Dallas Tonsager, a member of the Farm Credit Administration board, to be under secretary for rural development.

Both positions require Senate confirmation.

Miller was the senior analyst for agriculture and trade on the Democratic majority staff of the Senate Budget Committee during the development of the 2008 farm bill and did agricultural analysis for Senate Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad, D-N.D. His appointment is likely to be reassuring to farm leaders who have been concerned by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack's recent comments that some farm subsidies may need to be cut.

Miller operated a fourth generation family farm in eastern Washington state for 20 years, and his family still grows wheat, barley, lentils and canola. He entered politics and public policy as the president of the National Association of Wheat Growers. He moved into full-time lobbying in 1987, becoming the wheat growers' vice president for government relations.

Miller was co-chairman of the Canada-U.S. Joint Commission on Grains, a federal commission established to help resolve grain trade issues between the two countries. Miller is a graduate of Washington State University. He currently lives in Falls Church, Va., with his wife, Sandy. They have two married sons and two grandsons.

Rural development is one of the smaller, lesser-known divisions of USDA, but Tonsager may be a prominent official because the rural development division will be expected to carry out the administration's commitment to bring high-speed Internet service to unserved sections of rural America and to develop renewable fuels and other forms of alternative energy. Rural development is also in charge of programs that bring housing and water and waste-treatment facilities to lower-income communities and provide business loans for

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nonagricultural development.

Tonsager was appointed to the Farm Credit Administration board in 2004 and is serving a term that expires in 2010. He also serves as a member of the board of directors of the Farm Credit System Insurance Corporation, which is responsible for ensuring the timely payment of principal and interest on obligations issued on behalf of FCS banks.

Tonsager was executive director of the South Dakota Value-Added Agriculture Development Center in Huron from 2002 until his appointment to the FCA Board. He was also the South Dakota state director for rural development in the Clinton administration. In 1999, he was recognized as one of two outstanding state directors in the nation by then-USDA Under Secretary Jill Long Thompson.

Tonsager grew up on a dairy farm near Oldham, S.D. In partnership with his brother, he owns Plainview Farm in Oldham, a family farming operation that includes corn, soybeans, wheat and hay. Tonsager is a graduate of South Dakota State University, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture in 1976. He and his wife, Sharon, have two sons.

Vilsack said in a statement, "Jim Miller and Dallas Tonsager are well aware of the challenges and opportunities in rural America. They have dedicated their lives to enhancing the success and improving the lives of farmers, ranchers and those living in rural areas."

Jerry Hagstrom can be reached at jerry.hagstrom@dtm.com

(AG)

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Informa: Corn Acres Tumble More Bean Acres Than Corn

Fri Mar 13, 2009 11:16 AM CDT

OMAHA (DTN) -- There will be some sizeable shifts in corn, wheat and soybean acreage this year, according to the 2009 prospective plantings report from Informa Economics.

Corn acreage is expected to drop 4.6 million acres from last year, to 81.4 million acres, soybean acreage is expected to increase 5.8 million acres to 81.5 million acres, and all wheat acreage is expected to decrease by 3.5 million acres to 59.7 million acres, the private analytical firm told clients Friday morning.

By comparison, USDA's latest projections for projected this year's plantings are 86 million acres for corn, 77 million acres for soybeans and 58 million acres for wheat.

Informa's projections are based on a survey conducted in late February and early March.

Total planted acreage is projected at just over 314 million acres, the largest since 2004, Informa said.

Informa said cotton acreage is estimated at 8.34 million acres, down 1.1 million acres from 2008.

Earlier this morning, Allendale, Inc., an Illinois research and brokerage firm, released its planting intentions report, based on a survey of farmers in 23 states.

Allendale said corn planted acreage could be down to 85.4 million acres, and soybean acreage could rise to 80.4 million acres. Winter wheat acreage is projected to fall to 42.1 million acres and other spring wheat to 13.2 million acres.

Allendale said corn production could total 12.240 billion bushels, assuming a trend yield of 156.95 bushels per acre.

Allendale pegged soybean planting at 80.439 million acres; with yield of 42.44 bushels per acre, production would reach a record 3.367 billion bushels.

Allendale estimated wheat acreage at 57.977 million acres; with a trend yield of 43.95 bushels per acre, wheat production would total 2.170 billion bushels.

USDA will release its annual planting intentions report March 31.

DTN Senior Analyst Darin Newsom said the actual mix of acres doesn't matter a great deal this year, given the ample stocks in corn and wheat and the

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likelihood of an increase in soybean plantings.

"Corn ending stocks are projected at almost 1.75 billion bushels. Does it matter if we see a one-million acre, or even a three-million acre, decrease in planted acreage? No, the U.S. isn't going to run out of corn. It could certainly lead to a tighter situation IF ethanol demand expands once again but that is an outlier at this point," Newsom said.

"In soybeans, yes, ending stocks should tighten up, leading to a lower beginning stocks number for 2009-2010. However, expectations are for soybeans to gain acres from peanuts, cotton, spring wheat, winter wheat, and corn. Not to mention probably grain sorghum. It is hard to imagine that total bean acres won't increase by two million to three million acres, so the intentions report is basically moot.

"The most interesting number could come in spring wheat where a sizeable reduction is expected," Newsom said. "However, with demand for U.S. wheat projected at an anemic 980 million bushels in 2008-2009, a shortage of total bushels seems unlikely regardless of acreage. Yes, quality spring wheat could be in short-supply by mid 2009-2010, but it seems the market is comfortable crossing that bridge when we get there."

(Prt/AM/AG)

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3/13/2009 2:43:36 PM
Quick Update on Key Issues
by Jim Wiesemeyer

via a special arrangement with Informa Economics, Inc.

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Outlook for farm bill changes, ethanol and more

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Quick update on key issues. The following is an update on some key economic, energy, farm and trade policy issues:

-- **Farm bill changes:** The Obama/Vilsack proposal to phase out over three years direct payments for farmers with gross sales over \$500,000 is going nowhere. No major farm bill changes are likely this year or in 2010. However, with budget deficits over \$1 trillion very likely over each of the next three years, agriculture spending cuts will be part of a forthcoming congressional exercise ahead. But that is not likely to occur until early in 2011 -- after the 2010 elections -- and that means for the Fiscal Year 2012 budget.

-- **U.S. economy:** A growing number of analysts do not see any growth for the U.S. economy until the fourth quarter this year, and perhaps not until 2010. Many see an L-shaped recovery in which the U.S. economy could show tepid growth far longer than most now realize.

-- **Ethanol:** With big hitters in Washington pressing for an increase in the current 10% maximum blend of corn-based ethanol for non-flex fuel vehicles, the odds are growing that the EPA will eventually announce an increase in the blend level. But sources signal a boost of just a few percentage points initially, with perhaps an increase to the 15% area in 2010 or later.

-- **Food safety reform:** In the past when there was a food safety incident, lawmakers and administration officials would say the U.S. still had the best food safety system in the world, but what was needed was more inspectors and funding. But now those same officials are saying the food safety system is broken and needs reformed. That means it is just a matter of time when reform legislation is voted on and implemented. Food safety-related hearing are already on tap in Congress and the push is on to ink new legislation yet this calendar year, with others seeing a 2010 likelihood. While some lawmakers want a single food agency, the odds are still under 50% of that occurring for a host of reasons. But single-food-agency proponents have the best opportunity in years to accomplish their goal, so this possibility cannot be ruled out.

-- **Mandatory country-of-origin labeling (MCOOL):** There is almost MCOOL fatigue in Washington, at least until this summer when lawmakers and the Obama administration see how the meat industry is complying at least with the announced regulations. USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack's "voluntary" requests to the industry will not likely be followed. The U.S. government and food industry lobbyists will be conducting polls to see how the meat industry is complying.

If around 90% of beef and pork products impacted by MCOOL are in Category A (born, raised and slaughtered in the U.S.), then Congress will not push for any other major changes. If the percentage isn't close to 90%, lawmakers, prodded by the Obama administration, will very likely seek changes. Also, the current exemption for processed meat products is an issue that keeps coming up, with USDA's Vilsack already signaling he wants some changes in this area.

-- Trade policy issues:

- **Cuba:** Although the Fiscal Year 2009 omnibus spending bill includes language providing flexibility for U.S. farm exports to Cuba, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner told some lawmakers that Cuba provisions would have little impact on current law, a pledge that helped ease concerns of two Democratic senators so they would vote for the spending package.
- **Panama FTA:** Congressional sources predict the long-pending Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Panama will be approved this calendar year. But other pending FTAs with Colombia and South Korea await so-called “benchmarks” before the Obama administration will seek legislative approval. That will take time and is more likely a matter for 2010, not this year.
- **Trade agreement enforcement:** Ron Kirk, President Obama's nominee to be the new U.S. Trade Representative, told Congress he would focus on enforcement of existing agreements, without detailing what that will entail. If U.S. trading partners view any enforcement action as protectionist, they will not hesitate to retaliate.

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Lawmakers will pass the hard \$250,000 cap per farmer on crop subsidies that the White House wants. Many from both parties have long wanted to do that, especially Senate Democrats. It'll apply to USDA aid in a year or two.

Congress will also tweak crop insurance to slow spending increases but won't agree to Obama's plans to reduce subsidies on farmer premiums. Congress started already last year to rein in insurance company margins.

But it won't stop direct payments to farmers with over \$500,000 in sales:

This proposal will be remembered as a political misstep by Obama. It raises fury in farm country, lacking support by even the farm state lawmakers who advocate cutting ag subsidies...the White House didn't vet it with them.

As a practical matter, sales are a poor yardstick for limiting payments.

A farm's sales volume may be unrelated to any measure of income. A farm with \$500,000/year in sales may have big or small profits or even a loss. Still, about 120,000 U.S. farms normally record at least that volume of sales, and over half receive direct payments, so Obama would cut off those subsidies.

Congress has taken an alternate path, basing such cutbacks on income. In '08, it cut off crop subsidies to those with nonfarm adjusted gross income averaging over \$500,000. Limits also apply if *farm* income exceeds \$750,000.

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Policies based on overall crop revenue are paying off smartly for farmers.

Indemnities paid on them are already 2.5 times the year-ago level:
\$6 billion and mounting, despite average or better '08 yields for major insured crops.

Basically, revenue policies are working as intended: Paying off when yields are normal but prices fall before harvest, such as in '08. Then, policies insured corn at \$5.40/bu. and paid the difference between it and the harvest price of \$3.74, even though the farmer may have sold the crop for over \$5.40. Such policies are sold for soybeans, corn, wheat, cotton and other crops. Claims paid will top \$7.2 billion on all '08 policies, twice the '07 payout: Farmers' premiums will cover 60% of it.

But odds aren't great such policies will sprout big payouts on '09 crops. USDA's insured price of \$4.04/bu. in most states for '09 corn is far down from '08. Ditto for soybeans, \$8.80/bu...spring wheat, \$6.20/bu. See the full '09 list of prices at kiplinger.com/letterlinks/croprev. Note: Sign-up ends on March 16 for most crops.

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A new USDA program gets hiccups trying to favor both farmers and schools. It'll award \$40 million this year for schools to buy raw fruit and veggies. The schools can opt to declare a bias to local farmers. But to ensure small farms an even shot, such orders must be "unprocessed" to qualify. However, that means school kitchens will have to do all cutting, peeling, bagging, etc., to get those items ready as snacks in classrooms. Some schools say the definition of unprocessed deters participation. Ag Sec. Tom Vilsack is a fresh-foods activist. He'll ensure the term is used sensibly.

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A bevy of state legislatures are pushing to restore humane horse slaughter: Ariz., Kan., Minn., N.D., S.D., Utah, Wyo. and other states are taking action that urges Congress to reverse the closings of the few U.S. horse slaughter plants that were open till '07. Such sites killed over 100,000 aged and failing horses a year, and a wave of neglected and abandoned horses has followed the plant closings.

Some assemblies are considering bills to allow for horse slaughter plants, including feasibility studies and promoting investment in establishing such facilities. Lawmakers in those states...Ark., Ill., Mont., N.D., Mo. and Tenn...hear from voters who are dealing with horse care crises but also from animal rights advocates who are sure to complicate the operation of a slaughter plant. Also, USDA is blocked from inspecting horse meat for human use, and that limits its market potential.

In Congress, the Senate will block a permanent ban on slaughtering horses, though the House will pass it overwhelmingly: All senators have rural constituents and must face the results of votes on this matter, while most House members don't... and won't. Also, some state legislatures are pressing Congress to nix the legislation.

But lawmakers will fund more stop-gap care of wild horses on public lands. A recession-strapped public has all but quit adopting wild horses across the West, leaving the Bureau of Land Management with a bulging herd of 33,000 wild horses and a shortage of funding and holding facilities to care for them. It's not helping that BLM's negotiations with the sponsor of a huge horse refuge has foundered.

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Cap, trade legislation will take back seat to health care reform, congressional leaders say

Dan Looker
Successful Farming magazine Business Editor

3/13/2009, 7:13 AM CDT



With President Barack Obama and Congress tackling many big issues this year - health care reform, education, climate change -- the effort on climate change could be delayed, along with possible legislation to cap greenhouse gasses and allow trading of offsets.

That's what two influential Democrats in Congress told Agriculture Online Thursday. Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said he doubts that cap and trade legislation will be completed in the Senate this year.

"Our number one priority right now is health care reform," Harkin said.

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Harkin, who has long favored farm programs that make "green payments" for long term practices such as planting trees and grasses, said he still has questions about exactly how a cap and trade program would work. Under cap and trade, large factories and power plants that put out greenhouse gasses would be required to buy offsets. Europe already has mandatory cap and trade legislation that allows big sources of greenhouse gases to buy offsets from industries that are reducing greenhouse gas pollution. But that system does not include offsets like capturing carbon in soils on farms and in forests, something that advocates say has the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% or more.

Harkin said he still has questions about how a cap and trade law would work.

"The sticking point is the inspection regime. How do you make sure people are actually complying?" Harkin wondered Thursday. "If you're going to have agricultural offsets, you've got to make sure they're complying. Whoever sequesters carbon, you've got to make sure it's actually happening."

Harkin said that the best way to capture carbon may be in pastures and trees, practices that take a commitment of many years.

In the Senate, Californian Barbara Boxer, head of the Environment and Public Works Committee, has indicated interest in getting a climate change bill passed this year. In the House, Representative Henry Waxman, another Californian who heads the Energy and Environment Committee, has outlined a goal of getting a bill out of his committee by Memorial Day.

Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin of South Dakota told *Agriculture Online* Thursday, "I think that is a very aggressive schedule."

Herseth Sandlin repeated an assertion made earlier this week that she would not support cap and trade if it doesn't include agricultural offsets that would be paid to farmers and landowners under the program. And she's concerned about how caps on emissions might affect coal-fired power plants that supply electricity to rural areas.

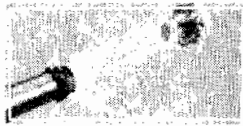
Besides serving on the House Agriculture Committee, Herseth Sandlin is on a the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, which was formed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in 2007.

"I would agree with Senator Harkin's assessment that it's not likely that climate change legislation would be signed into law before the end of the year," she said Thursday.

According to published reports, other congressional leaders, including Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, still want to get climate change legislation passed this year.

That makes this issue crucial for agriculture, says Laura Sands, coordinator of the Ag Carbon Market Working Group, which represents a coalition of farm leaders from commodity groups.

In an e-mail message to *Agriculture Online*, Sands said, "Farmers know that it is critical that members of Congress with agricultural interests are stepping up to ensure that the interests of their constituents are represented and protected. We realize that some in the leadership of Congress have established an aggressive schedule for cap and trade. We think a bill will pass in the next several years and what happens to offset proposals this year could set the precedent for any type of cap and trade policy that evolves in the future. What is important right now for farmers is that agricultural and rural members of Congress establish a strong offsets provision that reduces the cost to the economy and develops a significant, multi-billion dollar carbon market for farmers."



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Ag groups oppose cuts to safety net

Mar 13, 2009 12:55 PM

A letter co-signed by 39 other agricultural and related organizations and sent to congressional leaders expresses "strong opposition to the more than \$16 billion in cuts to the farm safety net proposed in President Obama's fiscal 2010 budget." The USA Rice Federation developed and coordinated the budget letter.

The organizations sent the detailed letter to House and Senate budget and agriculture committee chairmen and ranking Republicans.

U.S. producers are struggling to understand and comply with confusing, costly and burdensome payment and eligibility rule changes that far exceed what the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (farm bill) required, the Congress intended, and producers anticipated.

The "cuts ... threaten, once again, to change the rules midstream on American farm and ranch families," the letter said.

The letter's signatories said the proposed spending reductions would "strike at the economic heart" of full-time farm families of all sizes "in the midst of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression ... [and] at a time when net farm income is projected to be down 20 percent."

The proposals threaten "the viability of ... family-owned farms and ranches," which would further undermine the U.S. economy, the letter said.

Organizations signing with the USA Rice Federation:

- Alabama Peanut Producers Association
- American Association of Crop Insurers
- American Beekeeping Federation
- American Farm Bureau Federation
- American Sesame Growers Association
- American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers
- American Soybean Association
- American Sugar Alliance
- CoBank
- Crop Insurance Professionals Association
- Crop Insurance Research Bureau
- Farm Credit Council
- Florida Peanut Producers Association
- Georgia Peanut Commission
- Independent Community Bankers of America
- Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America
- Mississippi Peanut Growers Association
- National Association of Wheat Growers
- National Barley Growers Association
- National Corn Growers Association
- National Cotton Council

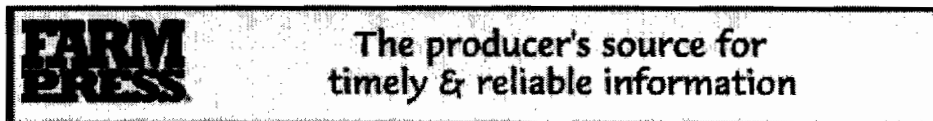
- National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
- National Farmers Union
- National Sorghum Producers
- National Sunflower Association
- North Carolina Peanut Growers Association
- Northeast States Association for Agriculture Stewardship
- Peanut Growers Cooperative Marketing Association
- Rain and Hail LLC
- Rural Community Insurance Services
- State Agriculture and Rural Leaders
- Southern Peanut Farmers Federation
- Southwest Council of Agribusiness
- United Dairymen of Arizona
- US Canola Association
- US Rice Producers Association
- USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council
- USA Rice Federation
- Virginia Peanut Growers Association
- Western Peanut Growers Association

Find this article at:

<http://www.deltafarmpress.com/legislative/safety-net-0313/index.html>

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Senate Democrats' rural agenda

Mar 13, 2009 9:50 AM

Senate Democrats have unveiled a "rural agenda" for the 111th Congress and a Web site highlighting issues important to rural communities and promoting policies that will benefit rural areas.

The developments were announced by Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark., a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee. She serves as chair of Rural Outreach for the Senate Democratic Caucus.

"Our rural communities are suffering during these tough economic times, and it is critical that we focus on policies that will give them the economic boost they desperately need and deserve," said Lincoln. "This agenda will help guide Senate Democrats as we work toward policies that will revitalize and reinvest in the rural economy."

Under their rural agenda, Lincoln said, Senate Democrats will concentrate on the following over the next two years:

- Health care — Providing rural Americans with access to affordable, quality health care.
- Education — Offering students in rural America an opportunity to excel in the classroom through education policy that recognizes the unique challenges for rural schools.
- Economic development — Promoting economic development programs and initiatives to give rural communities the tools needed for success in a changing global economy.
- Agriculture — Supporting family farmers, ranchers, and producers as a vital part of the rural economy.
- Energy and natural resources — Promoting rural America as a leader in the development of renewable energy technologies that will help stimulate the rural economy, while preserving our environment for future generations.
- Veterans and National Guard — Ensuring that our nation's veterans and service members are provided with benefits and services worthy of their sacrifices.
- Rural law enforcement and Homeland Security — Equipping first responders with the training and tools necessary to protect rural communities.
- Infrastructure — Investing in infrastructure in order to create jobs and build a sustainable rural economy.

"Senate Democrats will continue to make the more than 50 million hard-working rural Americans a top priority," said Lincoln, who announced the new agenda during a conference call with interest groups and reporters.

The Senate Democratic Rural Outreach Web site can be accessed at Senate Democrats' rural agenda.

Find this article at:

<http://www.deltafarmpress.com/legislative/rural-agenda-0313/index.html>

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National & World Ag News Headlines

HBO to Premier Film on Animal Cruelty

USAgNet - 03/13/2009

HBO is set to air a new special on animal cruelty, which reportedly may have some producers of pork in the U.S. a little concerned. As reported by Reuters, the film, set to first air on March 16, will deal with cruelty in factory farming and possibly set the stage for changes in rules that involve the treatment of farm animals.

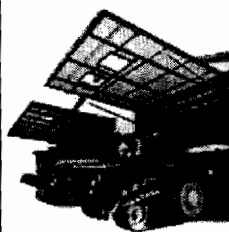
"I think you will see retailers pay much more attention to it (animal welfare), particularly with some of the recent topics that have surfaced or an HBO special that is coming up shortly. You will see retailers respond to it," he said.

The network says "Death on a Factory Farm" will showcase events pertaining to charges brought against owners of a farm in Ohio for animal cruelty. Jim McWade, Procurement Director with Delhaize supermarket chain, is quoted in the report as stating of the film's potential impact.

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Industry News - PM

E. coli cattle vaccine is conditionally approved

By Lisa M. Keefe on 3/13/2009

A vaccine that studies show reduces the incidence of E. coli 0157:H7 in cattle by 85 percent or more has received conditional approval, USDA announced.

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service granted the vaccine, made by a Minnesota company, a conditional license, which may be converted to a full license in a year, after additional studies.

Although this is the first vaccine to receive even conditional approval for sale, it is not the first to receive attention. A vaccine manufactured by an Ohio company was denied a license by USDA in 2007, and the company at that time planned to continue the required additional studies in hopes of getting approval at a later date. (See [USDA denies licensure for E. coli cattle vaccine](#), **Meatingplace**, Oct. 8, 2007.)

Another vaccine has been available in Canada, according to the *Associated Press*.

The new vaccine reduces the prevalence of E. coli 0157:H7 in 85 percent of cattle that received the vaccine, and those cattle that continued to carry the pathogen saw 98 percent fewer cells of the bacteria, the *AP* reported

Studies on the vaccine were conducted at West Texas A&M University and Kansas State University. (See [K-State research targets E. coli](#), on **Meatingplace**, Oct. 17, 2007.

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Industry News - PM

PETA wants to turn Pilgrim's plant into "chicken empathy museum"

By Janie Gabbett on 3/13/2009

PETA wants to turn Pilgrim's plant into "chicken empathy museum"

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals sent a letter to Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal suggesting he stop looking for another chicken company to buy Pilgrim's Pride's closing Farmerville processing plant and use the state funds he had offered a potential buyer instead to help PETA buy the plant and turn it into American's first chicken empathy museum.

Hoping to save some of the 1,300 jobs the plant closing will cause, Jindal has offered \$40 million in state funds for a \$60 billion joint bid with Foster Farms to buy the plant. (See [Louisiana offers millions more for Pilgrim's Pride plant](#) on [Meatingplace.com](#), March 13 2009.)

PETA suggested a chicken empathy museum could include educational displays that highlight interesting facts about chickens, "including that chickens are intelligent animals with mental abilities comparable to cats, dogs, and even primates and that in nature, mother hens cluck to their unborn chicks, who chirp back from inside their shells."

It also suggested a restaurant serving faux-chicken nuggets and a gift shop with free plush chickens for kids, with tags reading, "I Am Not a Nugget!"

A Pilgrim's Pride spokesman declined to comment on the letter.

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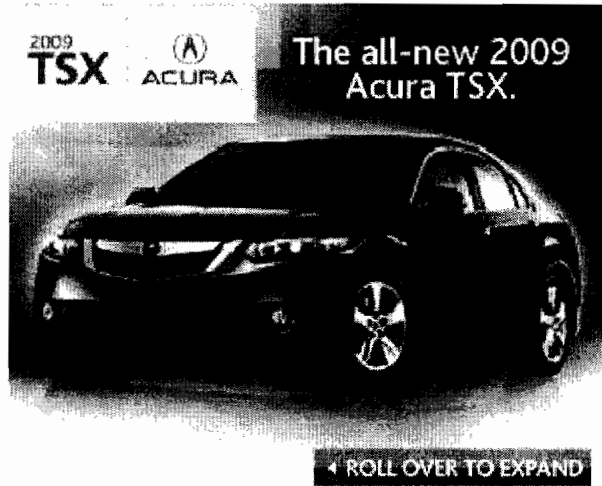
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Heavy duty hazard: Texas golf course yields bulldozer reported stolen after work began in 1996

By Associated Press

8:21 PM CDT, March 12, 2009

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WEATHERFORD, Texas (AP) — A golf course in Texas had a heavy duty hazard: A bulldozer reported stolen a decade ago has been found buried under a fairway.

The Dallas Morning News reports Thursday that investigators located the bulldozer at Canyon West Golf Course in Weatherford.

Detective Tyler Farrell with the Tarrant Regional Auto Crimes Task Force says a former golf course worker contacted authorities after noticing part of the bulldozer while fertilizing the course.

Farrell says a tractor also used to build the golf course was reported stolen after work began in 1996 and has not been recovered.

Weatherford is 30 miles west of Fort Worth.

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